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IN THE SHADOW OF THE CAPE: SUPERMAN AND DISRUPTIVITY

by

Kwasu D. Tembo

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Abstract

The discourse regarding contemporary comic book studies has become increasingly concerned with the apocalyptic potential of the power of comic book superbeings. While many consider Superman to be a morally upright and hopeful figure worth emulating, the idea of a creature as powerful and uncannily similar to human beings as Superman produces a type of paranoia, distrust, and unease. This type of disruptivity is a result of the combination of two foundational aspects of the character's being namely, its power, and its uncanny Otherness. Recent trends in the discourse concerning the cinematic depictions of the unavoidably destructive aspects of Superman's power indicate that the disruptive aspects of the character's being cannot be ameliorated by conventional appeals to dialectical arrangements of moral categories including good and evil. This also applies to nostalgic interpretations of the character that seek to dissolve the inextricable connection between the utopian and dystopian potential inherent in its power and Otherness in an idealized history. Situating itself between the aesthetic and historical comic book theory of Thomas Inge, Peter Coogan, Danny Fingeroth, Christopher Knowles, Clive Bloom, and Greg McCue and the philosophies/xenologies and critical approaches of Robert Freitas Jr., Michel Foucault, and Fredric Jameson, this project uses the concepts of the character's power, body, and Otherness to examine the existential and socio-political consequences of Superman's disruptivity on a diegetic earth.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to the memory of Dr. D. L. Tembo, my father.

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I will begin by thanking Dr. Lee Spinks and Dr. Jonny Murray for their steadfastness, both as supervisors and mentors. This project is deeply indebted to their dedication, candour, encouragement, and the quality of their tutelage over the past three years. My deepest gratitude and respect to both. I also thank my friends for their unwavering curiosity and faith. In particular, Mr. Pius Tamakloe for challenging my ideas with a balance of vehemence and sensitivity, Mr. Richard Philips Kerr, Mr. Alistair Grant, and Mr. Scott McClure for their support throughout the duration of this project and beyond. I would like to single out Mr. Jonathan Falconer, whose assistance with the visual component of this project was invaluable. I thank my mothers and my sisters for their unwavering belief in my capabilities and in my passion. This project would be impossible without them. Lastly, I thank those countless others who believed in me whenever I tried to shake the stars down.

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INTRODUCTION

HYPOTHESIS

The central argument of my thesis is based on the hypothesis that the DC Comics character Superman is inherently disruptive. In order to frame this hypothesis in a manner that addresses and considers the character's disruptivity within different narrative, historico-cultural and aesthetic contexts, I have elected to explore how the character's disruptivity manifests itself both extradiegetically and diegetically. I believe that such a methodology is helpful because it allows me discuss and examine precisely how and to whom or what the character is disruptive. Within the diegetic context of the character's publication history as an intellectual property of DC Comics, Superman is a fictional character that emerged and most predominantly appears in superhero comics since June 1938. As such, within the diegetic and hyperdiegetic contexts of the narrative and aesthetic of the character presented therein, Superman's disruptivity discharges itself in fundamentally different ways than it does extradiegetically. As an alien character that crash-lands in the context of a diegetic earth, earths which, in the orrery of DC Comics' Multiverse of earths, typically reflect extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality, a being that is as bio-physically Other and powerful as Superman is, presents scientific, legal and philosophical challenges to the denizens of said earths. The character's continued existence within these diegetically reflective spaces is disruptive in

myriad ways; from necessarily altering anthropocentric universal and world views, interrupting seemingly inviolable scientific laws and principles governing such fundamental phenomena like gravity and thermodynamics, unsettling identarian configurations of personhood and self, as well as the terrestrial socio-political hierarchies of power and the apparatuses that produce and reproduce them. At this early point, I will stress that this hypothesis concerning the character's inherent disruptivity is also intrinsically ambiguous. Regarding Superman as inherently disruptive is not to say that the character's disruptivity is inherently positive or negative and, instead, this hypothesis facilitates a range of conclusions. When regarding Superman as the coming of the Other in the form of an uncannily anthropic yet radically powerful alien being, one can view the character as a diminishment or suspension of humanity's centrality, sovereignty, and superiority. Alternatively, one can interpret Superman's existence in any diegetic earth that reflects the historical, cultural and socio-political configurations of extradiegetic reality as an important disruption, renegotiation or radical paradigm shift against the institutions and praxes of power and identity acting upon and reproducing being on said earths.

At this early point, I will also add that my approach to the various diegetic manifestations of the character's disruptivity are, for the most part, predicated on xenological speculation. This is due to the fact that aside from the character's mythos being typically described and identified as the extradiegetic archetype of the superhero genre, based on the basic premise and diegetically intergalactic

origins of the character, Superman's mythos is also embedded within the tradition of science fiction. As such, my exploration of the ways in which the various tensions, potentials and problems of power and identity manifest themselves in the character are based on the hypothesis that within the remit of a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical values, the existence of a being that is as Other and as powerful as Superman will necessarily disrupt said socio-political, cultural and historical configurations of said diegetic earths.

My approach to this hypothesis is not without precedent. While reviewing the publication history of the character during my research, I noted what can be described broadly as a genealogy of writers and artists who have depicted Superman as more disruptive, or centralized the disruptivity of the character in terms of its power and Otherness. It is their treatment of the character as insolubly disruptive toward the socio-political, cultural and historical structures of the diegetic earths in which it appears that influenced my own reading thereof. Identified over various decades, they include the following: Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's depiction of the character as a violent, proactive and truculent agent of socio-political change in the form of transgressing the law, and oftentimes the generally accepted humanistic sanctity of life. Many of Siegel and Shuster's early Superman narratives show the character employing morally and ethically contemptible methods including violence, and sometimes even murder, as a valid problem-solving strategies in pursuit of morally and ethically laudable ends

that typically manifest as a radically idiosyncratic and latently Marxist redressing of socio-economic disparity on behalf of the disenfranchised working class in the first ten issues of both *Action Comics* (circa June, 1938) and *Superman* titles; Elliot S! Maggin and Curt Swan's "Must There Be A Superman?" appearing in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 247 (January, 1972) in which the character's presence on a diegetic earth is conceptualized, for the first time, in terms of onto-existential atrophy. The text explores the idea that Superman's continued presence on a diegetic earth and its continued intercession in its affairs represents an irrevocable disruption against the progress, will to power and striving for human achievement of the diegetic human beings on that and many other earths of the DC Multiverse; John Byrne's "The Price" appearing in *Superman* Vol. 2, No. 22 (October, 1988) which, although taking place deep within the DC Comics hyperdiegeis, namely in a pocket universe, the text informed my approach to the question of Superman's power in relation to the relative powerlessness of the diegetic representations of human being it encounters. Furthermore, due to the fact that the text predominantly focusses on the psycho-emotional fallout that results from the character murdering living beings, irrespective of their moral standing on either side of the dialectic that acts as the character's lodestar in most of its adventures ('good' contra 'evil'), Byrne's characterization of a grief-stricken and traumatized Superman made me consider the various xenopsychological traumas that would result not just from this extremely powerful and uncannily anthropic character engaging in the murder of humans

or aliens alike, but from the character simply existing in a diegetic earth upon which it is always-already Other and more powerful than any and all human beings it encounters thereupon; Joe Kelly and Doug Mahnke's "What's So Funny About Truth Justice and the American Way" appearing in *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 775 (March, 2001) presents an interesting case study in which the upper regions of the character's disruptivity, namely its diegetic Otherness and power, are explored, specifically through violence and combat. In what amounts essentially to a duel that concludes the text, Kelly characterizes Superman's disruptivity and its otherwise careful maintenance of a hyper-vigilance over the destructive potential of the power of its Otherness and the Otherness of its power not only in terms of physical violence and infrastructural destruction, but the character as a fundamentally repressed being within the context of any diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political and cultural reality; and more recently, Tom Taylor and Jeremy Raapack's *Injustice: Gods Among Us: Year One* (March, 2016) comic book companion to the NetherRealm Studios video game of the same title. I found Taylor and Raapack's treatment of Superman as a global tyrant interesting for two main reasons. First, though Mark Millar had addressed the same theme previously in *Superman: Red Son* (2003) (which I shall discuss in the final chapter of this thesis), the reasons that catalyse the character's despotic reign over the diegetic humanities of each narrative's respective earths differs. Taylor characterizes the inciting incident that causes Superman to abandon its ostensibly unimpeachable tolerance and

altruism as the murder of that earth's Lois Lane at the hands of that earth's Joker. As such, the diegetic consequences of the character's highly partisan and self-interested approach to its interaction with diegetic humanity, symbolized in the comic as Lois Lane being pregnant with Superman's unborn child, I found the characterization of Superman's radical abandonment of tolerance and the global superpowered police state that subsequently emerges in the text to be an interesting example of how the character's disruptivity is precariously balanced on the tension between its power and its ability to ameliorate its Otherness within the socio-political and cultural codes and conventions of diegetic humanity. In view of the contributions to the portrayal and mythos of the character by those above and others, my intention throughout this thesis is to coalesce and advance their approaches to the diegetic disruptivity of Superman by parsing the basic hypothesis that Superman, as a diegetic representation of radical Otherness and power, is inherently disruptive to the diegetic representation of extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality. I will endeavour to achieve this goal in a way that does not solely focus on characterizations of Superman as a despot, or Superman as a traumatized victim of onto-existential duality. By comparing the basic hypothesis of the character's disruptivity against concepts including identarian fluidity and xenological onto-existentialism instead, this thesis will provide a more holistic profile of the character's disruptivity within the context of a diegetic earth.

My explorations of this hypothesis will also examine the ways in which the

character's disruptivity is, by definition, also inter-diegetic. By this I mean that the character's disruptivity has also manifested itself extradiegetically within the socio-political, cultural and historical reality of the creators and consumers of the character. While it is true that Superman, as a fictional character, is by definition line and colour on a screen or page, the character has come to be associated with and representative of various socio-political and cultural values and events over the course of its near century long publication history, ranging from jingoism, nationalism, war to parody. As perhaps the most iconic representation of the extradiegetic concept of the comic book superhero, the values and ideas Superman has been imbued with have changed over time. Being that the narrative and aesthetic treatment of the character's embodiment of said values has been disseminated through various media including comics, video games, film, radio, and television, both the creative teams and consumer base for the character's narratives have necessarily changed, and mean different things to different creators/consumers at different times since Superman's debut in *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 1 in 1938, to the present day. Furthermore, being that Superman is, extradiegetically, a fictional character that appears in diegetic earths that reflect extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical values not just of the United States, but global audiences as well, the nature of the character's narrative and aesthetic handling by the writer-artists creator teams that have worked on or with the content of its mythos over time has also necessarily reflected the changing attitudes, readerships and values of global

consumers for almost a century. Therefore, my exploration of the central hypothesis of this thesis as heretofore described will also historically contextualize the character in terms of its extradiegetic publication history to assess the ways in which socio-political conditions, including socio-economic and international crises such as the Depression, World War II, and the Civil Rights Movement, are reflected in DC Comics narrative and aesthetic presentation of Superman and, in particular, the character's power and Otherness.

TERMINOLOGY

Following on from the above outline of my approach to my central hypothesis, it is necessary to provide working definitions of important terms I have and will employ throughout. Within this project, the term diegetic refers to the fact that over the character's seventy-eight-year publication history, Superman's reality has been consciously expanded, unmade and remade multiple times and in a variety of significant ways. Diegetic terminology is employed where and whenever necessary throughout the project to make clear that a) when I am speaking about Superman, I am speaking about a fictional character and b) that this character is inter-diegetic, meaning that it appears in various diegetic/hyperdiegetic/extradiegetic universes, earths, worlds, realities, media, and therefore expresses a range of socio-political and onto-existential resonances in said worlds/realities. As such, my use of diegetic terminology is

intended to specify in what capacity both the character and its disruptivity are being discussed at any given time.

A helpful way of thinking about Superman, the character's history and its reality is to not think of them as unitary or even bound to either a single medium, space or time. Rather, Superman's reality is dispersed across three diegetic levels. Here, I borrow from Gérard Genette's multileveled system of analysing narrative fiction and its attendant terminology in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay In Method* (1980). In it, Genette describes the difference in the aforementioned three narratological levels by saying that

“any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed. [The creation of the narrative] is a literary act carried out at the first level, which we will call extradiegetic; the events told in [the narrative] are inside [the] narrative, so we will describe them as diegetic, or intradiegetic; a narrative in the second degree, we will call metadiegetic.” (Genette 228)

Additionally, he states that

“the prefix meta –obviously connotes here, as in 'metalanguage,' the transition to the second degree: the metanarrative is a narrative within the narrative, the metadiegesis is the universe of this second narrative, as the diegesis [...] designates the universe of the first narrative [...] Naturally, the eventual third degree will be a meta-metanarrative, with its meta-metadiegesis, etc.” (Genette 228)

In *Fan Cultures* (2002), Matt Hills describes this third degree of meta - metadiegesis or hyperdiegesis as “the creation of vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nonetheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension” (Hills 137). As such, when I am talking about Superman, I am always-already, unless otherwise specified, talking about Superman on the extradiegetic level, the diegetic level, and the hyperdiegetic level. Within this thesis, the term extradiegetic refers to the world of the reader, the artist and the writer. The world of Siegel and Shuster, of Morrison, Moore, Ellis and Ennis. The world of you or I where, within our reality and its confines, Superman and its publication history are the result of ink and light on a page or screen that can be read semiologically. As such, simulacra or simulacral elements of the extradiegetic level are reproduced and represented in the diegetic level and, more specifically, in the narratives it sustains or creates. Perhaps the most famous example of this kind of inter-diegesis is found in *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* (1978) written by Dennis O'Neil, illustrated by Neal Adams. In this story, Superman and the heavyweight boxing champion work together to foil an alien invasion of that earth. What is important to note in this text is the composition of the attendees of the boxing match, which range from DC Comics artist, writers, and other comic book creators more generally, to various international celebrities, fictional characters from DC Comics and Mad Magazine, to various internationally recognized literary, arts, sports and political

figures. A more recent example of this kind of inter-diegesis can be found in *Action Comics* Vol. 2, No. 14 (January, 2013). In this story, extradiegetic cosmologist and science communicator Neil DeGrasse Tyson appears in a diegetic narrative, in which he determines that Superman's home planet, Krypton, once orbited the extradiegetic red dwarf LHS 2520 in the extradiegetic constellation Corvus, 27. 1 light-years from our extradiegetic Earth. Tyson assisted the DC Comics editorial teams in helping them select an extradiegetic star that would be a suitable parent star to Krypton, selecting Corvus also in part due to its symbolic value – Corvus is Latin for "crow", the crow is the mascot of the character's high school football team, the Smallville Crows.

Inter-diegesis, therefore, forms the narrative and aesthetic loam for DC Comics' hyperdiegesis and is the reason behind the aesthetic, socio-political and historico-cultural resemblance between the diegetic world of Metropolis and the extradiegetic world of New York City, for example. The diegetic worlds of the DC Comics Multiverse reproduce a variety of versions of extradiegetic concepts and phenomena including presidents, floods, countries, baseball, corruption, wars, resources, love, planets, solar systems, universes and so on. The diegetic worlds are the worlds of the characters, their thoughts and their actions. These are the worlds of Superman, Lois Lane, The Justice League, Gotham, The Watchtower and The Phantom Zone in which both radical power and Otherness appear, represented by the superheroes and supervillains that both populate them and wield it therein. These diegetic worlds can, in turn, be reproduced and

combined on another level or levels, which I refer to as the hyperdiegetic.

The hyperdiegetic can be best described as a-story-within-a-story. For Superman, the DC Comics Multiverse itself, with its extensive array of worlds, universes, pocket dimensions and realms, is an example of hyperdiegesis. As with many aspects of the DC Multiverse, the number and nature of its infinite earths has undergone numerous revisions and additions. As noted in *The Multiversity Guidebook* Vol. 1, No. 1 (January, 2015) written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by various artists including Ivan Reis, Nicola Scott, Gary Frank and Dan Jurgens, DC's current orrery of worlds and spheres include, but are not limited to, the following: Earths 0-51, Wonderworld (which exists beyond the Speed Force Wall), KWWZZ (The so-called Radio Universe), Dream, Nightmare, Heaven, Hell, Skyland, Underworld, New Genesis, and Apokolips (which all exist beyond the Speed Force Wall in the Sphere of the Gods). Beyond these exist the Monitor Sphere, containing Nil. Furthermore, like the infinite degree of ontological and phenomenological variance that contemporary multiverse theorems propose, the DC Multiverse and its Elseworlds imprint offers variations of the basic narratological and aesthetic content any given character. Examples include: post-Crisis Pocket Universe Superboy, post-Crisis The Qwardian, Antimatter Universe and Earth-3 Ultraman, post-Crisis Earth-4 Superman named Captain Allen Adam, Earth-10's Nazi controlled Superman named Overman and the Communist Superman appearing in Mark Millar, Dave Johnson, and Kilian Plunketts' *Superman: Red Son* (2003).

The narratives published under the Elseworlds imprint take place outside DC's canon in which existing characters or narrative arcs can be deterritorialized and reterritorialized within alternate timelines or realities. Most Elseworlds narratives unfold in completely self-contained continuities whereby the only point of contact between the canon and the 'Imaginary Story', as they are sometimes referred to as, is the presence of a familiar character or characters. This affords artists and writers a creative space within which to experiment with different concepts and ideas by re-imagining the narratives and aesthetics of familiar characters in new and novel ways.

In this project, the term disruptivity refers to Superman's passive and active ability to rupture any absolutist summation of the conventionally accepted hierarchies of power and identity within the context of DC Comics' diegetic earths. In short, the character has the power to act in ways that diegetically transgress and subvert all limitations of what is thought humanly possible, and has done so consistently throughout its diegetic histories. Even without taking the phenomenal extremes of Superman's psycho-physical abilities into account, as an alien, the character is essentially Other to the limits of and acting upon diegetic human being. Diegetically, being born on the planet Krypton, Superman's power and body have a fundamentally unfamiliar provenance. However, Superman is also psycho-physically familiar because it looks and behaves like a human man. While the character's familiarity is reinforced by what I will later argue is its pathological support of what is typically understood

as conservative good morality, whereby Superman is often portrayed as a touchstone of laudable individual moral values, the incongruous aspects of both the character's own being and the human being it imitates are typically precluded in favour of facile, morally dialectic readings of its power and Otherness within the context of the diegetic realities in which it appears.

In this project, the term Otherness refers to the fact that Superman is not human. This deceptively simple observation is intended to draw attention to the paradoxical onto-existential aspects of the character's diegetic being. The superbeings of myth, religion, and entertainment found in narrative traditions of various cultures around the world, both ancient and modern, often originate (whether born or made) beyond the limits of terrestrial and/or human history; be it in an ethereal realm or the depths of intergalactic space. In this way, these figures are inherently transgressive and subversive because the diegetic Otherness of their existence paradoxically challenges and questions the anthropocentric value systems, world views and ideologies they either passively assimilate or actively serve in ways that both overtly and subtly necessitate a revaluation of the categories of being the humanities of their respective diegetic worlds employ in their self-understanding. Following Superman's arrival on a diegetic earth in the DC Multiverse, for example, life in that universe loses its anthropocentric privilege. In short, aside from simply being an uncannily anthropic alien living among human beings, the character is able to do things diegetic human beings cannot, thus necessitating a renegotiation or dissolution

of the pre-existing socio-political and onto-existential hierarchies of power and being on that earth.

My overarching intention throughout this project is to use what I will show to be the radical aspects of the character's power and Otherness, in conjunction with detailed aesthetic and historical analysis, to discuss and revise their socio-political and philosophical consequences and potentials within the context of the character's extradiegetic publication history, as well as its diegetic mythos. Such an approach is important for two main reasons. First, it encourages a type of analysis that recognizes the concept of the comic book superbeing as a resonant and complex engagement with the radical concepts of utopia and dystopia inherent in the concept of an uncanny and powerful being with access to enough power to either singlehandedly change or destroy a world. Second, it also acknowledges the fact that throughout their extradiegetic and diegetic histories, comic book superbeings like Superman are morally and ethically problematic. Under the aegis of human ideology, Superman has been consistently written and illustrated employing its extra-terrestrial power to extradiegetically and diegetically intercede in and enforce human values. In doing so, the character has and still is using its abilities to discipline and punish individuals whose behaviour transgresses ideologically determined norms established by human morality and law. Paradoxically however, the ostensibly 'corrective' portrayal of the character's abilities is often depicted to be enacted in ways that ultimately efface democratic rights, including due process and the

presumption of innocence. The fact that this type of justice is enacted by an extra-terrestrial being whose power and ability to obfuscate that power in the uncanniness of its body allows it to totally bypass all human institutions of power creates a hermeneutic problem as to whether to read Superman as an agent of redemption/salvation, or as a superpowered autocrat/invader.

The combination of historical analysis and philosophical/theoretical speculation is pivotal in providing a balanced examination of the character and the ontological, existential and socio-political tensions and potentials of its power and Otherness. In reading the character as inherently turbulent and disruptive toward the socio-political and onto-existential hierarchies of power on the earths within the DC Multiverse, my critique of Superman's power and Otherness necessarily gestures beyond dialectical morality, here understood as the conflict between 'good' and 'evil', common in extradiegetically and diegetically mainstream appraisals of the character, to consider more alternative conclusions which allow the most radical consequences of its being on and for those earths and its relationship with their human beings to be given their full scope. Texts that have been instrumental in helping me shape my analytical approach to the above hypothesis include: Joseph J. Darowski's *The Ages of Superman: Essays on the Man of Steel in Changing Times* (2012), Marco Arnaudo and Jamie Richards' *The Myth of the Superhero* (2013), Steven Popper's *Rethinking Superhero and Weapon Play* (2013), Mervi Miettinen's "All Men Are Not Created Equal: Identity, Power, and Resistance in Superman: Red

Son” in *Comics and Power: Representing and Questioning Culture, Subjects and Communities* (2015), and Scott Bukatman's *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (2003), particularly chapter three “The Grace of Beings” pp. 133-157.

Another important term in this thesis is xenology. In science fiction studies and criticism, the term xenology refers to a hypothetical science whose goal is the study and analysis of speculative extra-terrestrial societies as developed and inhabited by alien life forms. As such, xenology finds its terrestrial analogue in ethnology. Examples of xenological speculation in fiction and literary criticism include: Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005); C. J. Cherryh's *Foreigner* series (1993-present); Donal Kingsbury's *The Moon Goddess and the Son* (1986); and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Planet of Exile* (1966). Furthermore, related to xenology is the term xenophilosophy, which appears in the work of German Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass. In Halbfass's cultural studies, his particular usage of the term xenology refers to the largely ethnographic study of how a culture positively or negatively defines and reacts to/against individuals or groups outside, alien or Other to it. I have elected to use xenological speculation as a strategy to explore the character's diegetic power and Otherness because such a strategy not only centralizes the fact that Superman is an alien, but allows for a fuller exploration of the tensions and interactions between extra-terrestrials and human beings within the context of the diegetic earths of the DC multiverse.

Throughout this project, I have and will refer to Superman as 'it'. The convention of referring to the character using the pronoun 'he' already performs various kinds of reductive violence that I argue cannot be overlooked. 'He' superimposes anthropocentric codes, qualities and categories of being onto a being that is genetically and philosophically Other to them. As such, the third-person neuter pronoun 'it' is the most accurate and basic term with which to discuss any ontological or existential aspects of the character. The fact that Superman is an alien is taken as a first principle here. It is an extra-terrestrial creature that expresses many seemingly identical superficial traits with human beings that, however convincing, must not overlook the fact of Superman's essential difference from any and everything human. Furthermore, 'he', when considered fully, only accurately refers to one third of the personae 'worn' by 'Superman/Kal-El,' namely 'Clark Kent.' I have privileged the use of the pronoun 'it' in order to allow the being in question a greater degree of existential license, which I argue better allows us to apprehend what it is or can be without violently inscribing anthropocentric privileging and its various agendas onto the power it possesses and the Otherness that constitutes it.

My justification for discussing Superman by using the term 'it' is due in part to the underlying ethic of this thesis being xenological. If, for example, I am to consider Jameson's xenological approach to reading texts that feature alien beings seriously, then I think that the retention of the term "it" is important because it highlights the fact that Superman is an alien. Regardless of the

methodological approach one brings to bare on the character, regardless of how complex or nuanced, it would not change the fact that, diegetically speaking, the character is an alien. The combination of this fact and my wish to maintain a careful sensitivity toward xenological appraisals of Otherness would call for a strategy that does not hem up the onto-existential complexities of the character by simply referring to an alien being as “he” because it looks like a robust human man. To do so would simply be an inaccurate retention of anthropocentric privileging, a privileging that the central hypothesis seeks alternatives to. To be clear, I do not believe that referring to Superman as 'it' objectifies the character. On the contrary, I argue it draws attention to the fact that the character represents an interesting alternative to any human/inhuman dialectic precisely because it is *both* in interesting and challenging ways.

SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The scholarly and archival work that steered my approach, reading and goals in reassessing the concept of the comic book superbeing involved identifying analytical and thematic trends in secondary literature, contemporary and historical alike, examining various understandings and developments of comic book superbeings' powers, bodies and Othernesses. This historical analysis was subsequently used to revise the ways in which preceding studies of comic book superbeings applied to or influenced the numerous versions of Superman throughout its history. In order to do so holistically, I rigorously

engaged the primary material regarding Superman that considers aesthetic, historical, cultural and philosophical aspects of the character and other important albeit less mainstream characters that resemble it thematically, aesthetically or conceptually. This involved reading over three hundred comic books (single issues and trade paperbacks) in order to assess and develop the approach and structure of this project. A full list of titles read and consulted is provided in APPENDIX A at the end of this project.

My personal interest in the following theoretical and critical ideas also had a significant influence on my approach to Superman's power and Otherness and the utopian/dystopian potential inherent therein: Friedrich Nietzsche's concepts of Will to Power, the Übermensch, and the tensions between Apollonian and Dionysian forces in *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (1883-1891), *The Will to Power: In Science, Nature, Society and Art* (1973), and *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872); Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's post-identarian approach to desire in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972); Michel Foucault's discussion of carcerality and panopticism in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977); Jacques Derrida's ideas of Otherness and hauntology in *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1998) and *Spectres of Marx* (1993); Alain Badiou's idea and discussion of the Event in *Being and Event* (2005), Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses and the process of interpellation in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes toward an investigation)"

(1970); and Fredric Jameson's xenological/xenophilosophical examination of extra-terrestrial being in relation to the tradition of First Contact science fiction literature in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005).

I combined my interest in these ideas with my long-held admiration for writers and artists whose work presents non-binary approaches to either Superman itself or characters like it. These include Robert Kirkman's *Invincible* (2005), Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neil's *Marshall Law* (1987), Mark Waid's *Irredeemable* (2009), Warren Ellis's *Supergod* (2009), Garth Ennis's *The Boys* (2006), Jim Shooter's *Solar: Man of the Atom* (1991), and Alan Moore and Grant Morrisons' respective approaches to the ways in which comic book superbeings apocalyptically disrupt diegetic human being, its histories and its futures – particularly in *Watchmen* (1987), *Miracleman* (1990-1991), and *All-Star Superman* (2011). These texts informed my approach to Superman and the diegetic representation of the character's power, body and Otherness. The combination of these ideas inspired me to push my reading of the character's disruptivity to its radical utopian and dystopian conclusions which, in turn, led me to regard Superman not necessarily as a familiar benchmark of American popular culture, but rather as a powerful, complex and tragically idiosyncratic being. It may be difficult for some to view the character in a way that substitutes ardent moral dialecticism for radical revaluation because the link between Superman and concepts like, 'truth', 'justice', and 'the American way' has been

made seemingly inextricable in Western aesthetics and popular culture over the past seventy-eight years. While Terrence R. Wandtke and Richard Reynolds and a preponderance of others view Superman as a neo-myth that reflects aspects of moral and ethical praxes and the organization of Western culture in texts like *The Meaning of Superhero Comic Books* (2012) and *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (1994), I regard the character as a cultural myth that, though based on questions of identity, selfhood, Otherness, power, and the body, ultimately explores the monumental and pervasive tension between the idea of *changing* versus *saving* a world. In view of Superman having the power to literally build or destroy a new or old world, city by city, country by country, continent by continent, I am interested in the ontological, existential and socio-political implications of the character's power and Otherness on diegetic earths as presented within the context of DC Comics' Multiverse.

STRUCTURE

Having described the terminology and goals of this project, I will now set out its structure and content. Using Superman as a case study of the concept of the comic book superbeing, I will parse my central hypothesis, namely that Superman is both a character that is inherently diegetically disruptive, and extradiegetically reflects various socio-political, cultural and historical turbulences, through the following chapters. In CHAPTER I, I will outline

contemporary attitudes and approaches to comics' scholarship. This is so as to contextualize my own approach within the broader scope of current approaches not only to the study of comic books or comic book superbeings, but those that specifically pertain to Superman itself as well.

I will foreground CHAPTER II with an overview of the socio-political, economic, and cultural diegetic and extradiegetic contexts surrounding the character from the 1930s through to the 1990s. This chapter will further be broken down into subsections that focus on specific decades, beginning with 1930 and how various socio-political, cultural and historical factors influenced the development of the character over time. Using specific visual and thematic examples, the purpose of this chapter is to outline a genealogy of Superman throughout American comic book history. As such, the underlying goal of this chapter is to examine the evolution of the medium's aesthetic and narratological understanding and presentation of the character's power and Otherness. I will show how Superman's power and Otherness went from violent, murderous, and destructive in the late 1930s, to institutionalized and nationalized during the period of World War II and the early 1950s soon thereafter. I will then show how the disruptivity of Superman's power and Otherness was so successfully subsumed into the ideological and symbolic apparatuses of the American State that from the mid 1950s to approximately 1970, Superman became inextricably identified with the establishment and its interest in post-war stability, symbolized in this period by the recurrent theme of matrimonial union in the character's

narratives. I will argue that this revaluation of the character's power and Otherness was employed as a method of diffusing the inherently transgressive aspects of its disruptivity. I will then show how these prevailingly conventional and static understandings of the character's disruptivity as inextricable from moral righteousness and conservative civic-mindedness were out of place with American comics' prevalent preoccupation with anti-heroism, violence and realism from 1970 to 1986 that reflected the socio-political turmoil of 1980s America. As such, I will show how Superman's disruptivity, as a diegetically external or global threat, was turned inward from 1970 to 1986, which took the form of the character's creative teams subjecting it to extended periods of penetrating psycho-physical suffering in its narratives during this period. And lastly, I will examine the socio-political and, particularly economic, climate surrounding the character's diegetic death in the 1990s.

CHAPTER III will provide my analysis of various xenological aspects of the character, as an uncanny alien, in order to explore a range of conclusions that can be drawn from my central hypothesis. These will include providing a brief outline of contemporary critical approaches to xenological speculation, so as to situate my own xenological conclusions about the character within a wider stream of xenological speculation. In order to do achieve this end as methodically as possible, I have elected to base my xenological examination of Superman on four particular areas of xenological thinking. They are: xenopsychology; the nature and practice of First Contact scenarios and their

speculative outcomes; xenoweaponry, and xenointelligence. I will then move on to discuss one of the central shortcomings of xenological speculation, namely the problem of alien unknowability in two primary ways with regard to Superman. First, the relationship between unknowability and Superman's multiplicity of identities. Second, the relationship between unknowability and the radical scale of the character's physical power as shown throughout its publication history.

I will use CHAPTER IV to assess the idea of the latent fascism of a character like Superman's continued existence on a diegetic earth reflecting extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality. In order to widen the scope of texts considered beyond those of mainstream Superman comics, I will consider three non-mainstream comics that are apposite to this end. They are *The Boys*, *Marshal Law* and "Survivor" written by Dave Gibbons, illustrated by Ted McKeever appearing in comics anthology series *A-1* No. 1 (October, 1989) edited by Garry Leach and Dave Elliott.

Regarding the use of images in this project, in my research I found that in many texts offering critical analyses of Superman or superheroes more generally, the use of images ranged from purely decorative (e.g. Grant Morrison's *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero* (2012)), figurative, metaphorical, or in some cases satirical (e.g. Christopher Knowles' *Our Gods Wear Spandex* (2007)), to a mixture of both, combined with lucid aesthetic analysis (e.g. Peter Coogan's *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006)). In this project, images will be used to provide illustrative

examples of the arguments being developed therein. There will be no inclusion of images that are not accounted for in themselves, as well as in relation to the wider discussion taking place.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO COMICS SCHOLARSHIP

In order to foreground the various socio-political pressures, including censorship and changing comics readerships, acting upon and, therefore, influencing the production and consumption of comic book superheroes through various media, and Superman more specifically, I will open my thesis with a chapter that provides a broader context of the publication history of the character. There are many ways of going about this. Michel Parry's *Superheroes* (1978), Paul Simpson's *Superheroes: Rough Guide to Superheroes* (2004), Brian Walker's *The Comics Before 1945* (2004), Danny Fingeroth's *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, And The Creation of the Superhero* (2007), and Randy Duncan's *The Power of Comics: History, Form & Culture* (2015) all provide helpful starting points for an examination of the medium, the genre and its characters.

Current literature concerning comic book superbeings does not want for variety. A cursory glance at the archives of three prominent comics studies journals reveals that numerous analytical approaches have been brought to bear on the study of comic book characters, their mediums, techniques of representation and histories. These qualitative and quantitative interdisciplinary approaches include, but are not limited to, the following: racial and postcolonial

studies; LGBTQI studies; examinations of the format and multimedia presentation and adaptation of sequential narratives; aesthetic analysis of formal and technical aspects of sequential narratives; socio-political, cultural and economic studies of comics cultures and their impacts on global readerships; historiographical and biographical analyses of the medium, characters and their creators; philosophical and theoretical approaches to comics characters with, however, a predominant focus on theoretical approaches to the aesthetic and narratological experience of sequential narratives and their characters; and, childhood/youth studies and comics as pedagogical tools.

During my research, I discovered that the primary mode of comics' scholarship is historiographical. In terms of historiographical approaches, Will Jacobs and Gerard Jones' 1985 book *The Comic Book Heroes: From Silver Age to Present* (1985) has been broadly regarded as the first history of modern comic books. The text provides a detailed examination of the extradiegetic and diegetic pressures acting on the comic book industry from 1956 to the 1980s, as well as how the diegetic content of comics books, narratives and characters throughout this period reflect said pressures. This historiographical trend continued into the new millennium of comics' scholarship. For example, Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (2001) is still broadly underpinned by a historiographical approach to the study of comics, however, the text places a higher emphasis on the socio-cultural contexts in which comic books are produced and consumed. For Wright,

socio-cultural considerations of the “ethnic heritage of comic book makers” and extradiegetic political situations within which comics are published are as important as the analysis of their characters and narratives (Wright 41-42). As a result, more specific comic book histories have emerged. Gerard Jones’s *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (2004) and David Hajdu’s *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (2008) both provide more targeted analyses of specific moments in the cultural and publication history of North American comics. Jones’s text focuses primarily on the emergence of the comic book in relation to the socio-political and cultural pressures of the Depression. Similarly, albeit focusing on a later era, Hajdu’s text focusses primarily on the comic book industry’s socio-cultural and legal struggles for legitimacy in the late 1940s and 1950s.

It can be argued that the most exhaustive account of both the socio-cultural and political history of the comics’ medium and the character Superman itself is presented in Les Daniels’s *Superman: The Complete History* (1998). Daniels’s text provides a broad context of the comics’ industry and character by employing methodical research, including interviews with comics’ creators and editors involved with the production of Superman comics throughout the decades since the character’s debut in 1938. Even more specifically, there are analyses that focus on the publication and socio-cultural history of the character itself. These include Scott Beatty’s *Superman: The Ultimate Guide* (2006), Gary

Engle's 1987 essay "What Makes Superman So Darned American?", and Patrick L. Eagan's 1987 "A Flag with a Human Face" both featured in *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* (1987). Engle's essay focusses on the latent immigrant theme of Superman's story, claiming that the character's American appeal stems from its identity as an interstellar immigrant, while simultaneously contextualizing this reading of the character through a comparative analysis of other immigrant and orphan narratives. Eagan's essay discusses themes including moral and social problems of the American government, national safety, private property and social order which he argues are all latent within the character.

Eagan's and Engle's essays mark a notable shift in the scholastic approach to comics by both focusing and analysing cultural and industrial contexts instead of producing linear reports of comics' history, while also comparing their findings to related fields of scholarship concerning American frontier myths and U.S. foreign policy (Engle 80; Eagan 94). As a result, both texts have received broad scholarly attention since their publication and are often cited in contemporary analyses of Superman, superheroes, and popular culture more generally. These include Matthew McAllister and Ian Gordon's *Comics and Ideology* (2001), Danny Fingeroth's *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society* (2004), Wiley L. Umphlett's *The Visual Focus of American Media Culture in the 20th Century* (2004), and fantasy and science fiction criticism such as *Anatomy of Wonder: A*

Critical Guide to Science Fiction (2004) edited by Neil Barron.

Despite the field's ostensible holism, it is my contention that comic book scholarship of the past decade has neglected to maintain philosophical and critical analyses of comic book superbeings and the tensions inherent in the powers and Othernesses they express. In view of the current and ongoing scholarship, analyses like the one presented in this thesis appear intermittently rather than frequently. The three aforementioned journals have produced hundreds of papers, reviews and interviews on the subject of comic books, their characters and their histories. Of that collection, I found only sixteen articles that address the more speculative, philosophical and theoretical aspects of the comic book superbeings, their powers, bodies and Othernesses in any sustained or direct way. They are as follows: "Drawing from the body-the self, the gaze, and the other in Boy's Love manga" by Uli Mayer (2013); "Seeing Double: the transforming personalities of Alan Moore's *Promethea* and the Ulster Cycle's Cuchulain" by Hannah Means-Shannon (2010); "Full page insight: the apocalyptic moment in comics written by Alan Moore" by Rikke Platz-Corsten (2014); "Batman's Joker, a neo-modern clown of violence" by A.-S. Jürgens (2014); "Superheroes and the contradiction of sovereignty" by Neal Curtis (2013); "Violent Cases and Mr. Punch: Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean reflect darkly on the dark imagery of individuation" by Hannah Means-Shannon (2012); "Philosophy in the fairground: Thoughts on madness and madness in thought in *The Killing Joke*" by Deneb Koyikoski Valereto (2011); "Alan Moore, *Watchmen*,

and some notes on the ideology of superhero comics” by Mario Pellitteri (2011); “Pirate multiplicities: Aion, chronus, and magical inscription in the graphic novels of Alan Moore” by Charlie Blake (2011); “Multiplicity, one world? On the chronotope in Alan Moore and Gene Ha's Top 10” by Rikke Platz-Corsten (2011); “From Akira to Žižek: Comics and contemporary cultural theory” by Tony Venezia (2012); “Retopia: The dialectics of the superhero comic book” by Matt Yockey (2012); “The Abyss Gazes Also: The Self-Referential Cynicism of Watchmen” by Mathew Levy and Heather Mathews (2013); “Incommensurable Ontologies and the return of the Witness in Neil Gaiman's 1602” by James R. Fleming (2008); and “Gotham (K)Nights: Utopianism, American Mythology, and Frank Miller's Bat(-topia)” by Graham J. Murphy (2008).

The U.S, the country that produced the mythos of the character Superman, is not the same country it was in the 1950s as it was in the late 1930s during the era of the character's creation. As Danny Fingeroth notes in *Superman on the Couch*, “the superhero—more than even the ordinary fictional hero—has to represent the values of the society that produces him. That means that what[...]Superman symbolizes changes over time” (Fingeroth 17). It therefore follows that as the extradiegetic socio-political, industrial and global values of American consumers changed over time, so too did their diegetic reflection in the mythos of Superman and the character's narrative and aesthetic characterization. In *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography* (2013), Glen Weldon states that “Superman has become more than a function of cross-

platform synergy and optimized revenue streams” (Weldon 2). In other words, over the character’s publication history, Superman has come to mean and/or represent different things to different people at different times. For Weldon,

“Superman's perceived status as a static fixture of popular culture, an unchanging icon of spandex-clad heroism, is an illusion...everything about him exists in a state of perpetual flux. The particulars of his origin and his power-set have vacillated wildly. So, too, has his persona continually evolved: in his first few years of life, he was our hot-headed, protective big brother; he spent the forties and fifties assuming the role of our coolly distant father; he morphed in the sixties and seventies into our bemused, out-of-touch uncle, and he even became – mercifully briefly, in the benighted nineties – our mulleted, hillbilly cousin.” (Weldon 2)

As a character whose primary function in its diegetic narratives has historically been to primarily overcome threats to various life forms on various diegetic worlds, human and alien alike, Superman's narrative evolution can be traced through even a cursory look at the enemies/threats it has faced throughout its publication history. As Weldon states,

“For the first few years of his life, Superman was the ballistic missile brought to the knife fight, as writer Jerry Siegel simply let his grinning Man of Steel hopelessly outmatch petty thugs, goons, and yeggs. When this inevitably began to pall, Superman started facing off with pesky tricksters and mad scientists armed with deadly gadgets. Later, when the radio

show introduced a mysterious substance that could actually kill the Man of Steel, the stakes rose considerably. Since then, the threats to his existence – and to the world and, in point of fact, to the cosmos itself – have only escalated exponentially.” (Weldon 2)

While noted comics writer Alvin Schwartz's approach to Superman was not to constrict the character to a binary by attempting “to change Superman from being a meathead who simply had a harder punch into something more human and philosophical,” it is helpful to consider the following range of appraisal's of the character from noted comics writers and artists in Michael Eury's *The Krypton Companion: A Historical Exploration of Superman Comic Books of 1958-1986* (2006) to illustrate how variously the character has been and is currently understood by creators in the comics industry (Tye 62).

Eury asks the participants of a roundtable discussion he individuated “Superman went from Boy Scout to father figure in the Silver Age, then became a “friend” thanks to Christopher Reeve. How would you describe Superman today?” Jeph Loeb answers that he views the character as essentially “the same. It's just how [you] play him. I wish he wasn't married. It's enormously restricting since the best comic-book stories are the melodrama of the human experience, and when love is limited to one person (in fiction) there's only so many corners you can paint the character into.” Karl Kesel offers a more quintessential appraisal of the character, stating that his “current take on Superman...goes back to [Jerry] Siegel and [Joe] Shuster's original intent, in

some ways, of Superman as a wish-fulfilment character.” Roger Stern's answer offers a view of the character that centralizes its status as a superhero, stating that though Superman is often viewed as a diegetic Father Figure, he views the character as being more of a

“cool uncle or big brother figure...a big brother in a good way, not in a “Big Brother is watching you” way...Superman is the hero that we wish we could be, especially when the going gets tough. You know, like when a space shuttle has a hole in its wing, we wish that we could just take a deep breath and fly up to the rescue. Or when sailors are trapped in a submarine on the ocean floor, we wish that we could dive down there and bring them safely to the surface. And since we're not Superman – since we're not faster than a speeding bullet and more powerful than a locomotive – we wish that there was a hero like him to be there by our side.”

Conversely, Jon Bogdanove's response centralizes the character's status as a paradigmatic American pop-cultural and national icon, and the extradiegetic and diegetic tensions that result. He states that

“certainly Superman has become a national icon. All you need to do is visit the Midwest, especially Metropolis, Illinois, to experience the nearly religious nature of people's love for him. I perceive that for a vast amount of Americans he ranks somewhere between Elvis and Jesus. Many people overlay biblical parallels on Superman, drawing out the similarities

in the story with the stories of Moses and Jesus. Much has also been written about Superman as an expression of our idealized national character. Clearly Superman resonates deeply through our culture – at least the idea of him does. Yet, only a fraction of Americans read his comics. Why? It may be that the weight of being an American icon is too big a burden for the character. For most writers or artists, it may be too difficult to write or draw stories, or versions of the character, that consistently fulfil everyone's heartfelt vision. Superman means so much to so many people that it is a rare comic that can satisfy them all. There are so many expectations and so much baggage, the status quo of the classic myth is too sacred to challenge. But drama requires challenging the status quo, even if it is ultimately restored. It's hard to make an interesting story that won't violate someone's idea of what Superman should be. Similarly, it's difficult and challenging, if not impossible, to draw a personal interpretation of Superman that won't completely miss the mark for some fans."

Kurt Busiek's view of the character addresses its connection/reflection of contemporary extradiegetic conditions and what Superman is missing or has lost in so far as addressing the extradiegetic fears and desires of the contemporary reader over time. He describes Superman as

"a fighter. It's a rougher, more troubled world in a lot of ways, and that sense of security, that all Superman needed to do was maintain the

status quo against outside threats, just doesn't seem like enough anymore. Superman needs some of that original, scrappy, Siegel-and-Shuster spirit, as the guy who who'll take on entrenched power in the name of the little guy, and win through. He's still a friend, but in a shakier world, you need a friend who'll dig in a little more, who'll help fix what needs fixing. That's Superman – and that's Clark, too, with the Daily Planet behind him. Clark reminds us that the world is what we make of it, and Superman helps make sure we have the chance to try.”

In contrast, Mike Carlin simply considers Superman as “a cool guy to have on [your] team.” John Byrne, however, is more severe, describing the character as a “conflicted whiner. Basically a caricature of the way he was portrayed in the Christopher Reeve movie.” Walter Simonson rather comically describes Superman as “an old married guy,” whereas Mark Waid considers the character as being “way too blessed.” Alex Ross appraises the character as a symbol of fading nostalgia, stating that

“the Superman that has most been seen during the past five years [2001-2006] is the one from the romantic TV show, the entertaining Smallville drama.... But Superman often falls back into the mould of being not so much the father figure, but instead your father's Oldsmobile, a character that a lot of old-fart collectors like, but not the brash, young, hip kids.”

While Dan Jurgens describes Superman as “still something of a father figure and always will be because of his stature within the industry”, Jerry Ordway

describes the character circa 2006 as seeming “too much of a 'victim' these days” (Eury 211-235).

Ross's comments also allude to the fact that the varying opinions of the character stem from the different portrayals and characterizations of Superman in different media, thereby producing a simultaneity of “Supermen” across different media, at different times. Aside from printed media, extradiegetically, the character has been portrayed in television, film, radio, and video games by the 1990s. Actors who have played Superman or Superboy and/or Clark Kent include the following: Broadway actor Ray Middleton (1940) in 1939 New York World's Fair on July 3, 1940 during the fair's “Superman Day,” acting as judge for a contest involving the crowning of the “Super-Boy and Super-Girl of the Day”; bodybuilder Mayo Kaan (1940) acted as the body model for the original Superman short produced by the Fleischer Studios *Superman* animation's first airing on September 26, 1941; Kirk Alyn (1948-1950) portrayed the character in Columbia Pictures' 15-part black-and-white film serial titled *Superman* (serial); George Reeves (1951-1958) portrayed the character in Warner Brothers' black-and-white and colour television series *Superman: The Adventures of Superman* airing from September 19, 1952 to April 28, 1958. Christopher Reeve (1978-1987) iconically played Superman in *Superman: The Movie* (December 10, 1978) directed by Richard Donner, *Superman II* (December 4, 1980) directed by Richard Lester, *Superman III* (June 7, 1983) directed by Richard Lester, *Superman IV* (July 24, 1987) directed by Sidney J. Furie; Dean Cain (1993-

1997) portrayed the character alongside Teri Hatcher's Lois Lane in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* that aired from September 12, 1993 to June 14, 1997, which focused on the relationship between Clark Kent/Superman and Lois Lane; Tom Welling (2001-2011) played Kal-El/Clark Kent in *Smallville* which aired on The WB/The CW for ten seasons, from October 16, 2001 to May 13, 2011. The series focused predominantly on Clark Kent's upbringing and high-school years spent in Smallville, Kansas. Most recently, Tyler Hoechlin (2016 -present) is portraying the character in CBS's *Supergirl* television series originally airing on October 26, 2015. Contemporaneously, Henry Cavil (2013-present) is also portraying the character on film in Warner Bros. Pictures' *Justice League* set for a November 17, 2017 release. This follows Cavil's turn as Superman in *Man of Steel* (June 10, 2013) and *Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice* (March 19, 2016), both directed by Zack Snyder.

In terms of specifically audio portrayals of the character, Bud Collyer (1940-49, 1966-69) was the first to voice the character in the Fleischer Studios Superman animated short films from 1941 to 1943. These animated shorts are famous for their use of rotoscoping techniques to lend the character's movements a sense of added realism, and for the addition of flight to Superman's repertoire of powers and abilities. Collyer also voiced Superman in *The Adventures of Superman*, a long-running radio serial program originally airing from 1940 to 1951, syndicated on WOR. Danny Dark (1973-1986) voiced the character for ABC's 1973 animated series *Super Friends*. Tim Daly (1996-

2000, 2002, 2006, 2009-12) has voiced the character in numerous works in the past three decades including, WB's *Superman: The Animated Series* airing from September 6, 1996 to February 12, 2000, Warner Bros. Animation's direct to video animated feature film *Superman/Batman: Public Enemies* (September 29, 2009), and *Justice League: Doom* (February 28, 2012). George Newbern (2001-08, 2010, 2012-13) voiced the character in the Bruce Timm/Paul Dini created animated television series *Justice League* (November 17, 2001-May 29, 2004), as well as in NetherRealm Studios' fighting video game *Injustice: Gods Among Us* (April 16, 2013). More recently, Alan Tudyk voiced the character in the DC animated feature film *Justice League: War* (January 21, 2014). Most recently, Benjamin Bratt voiced a re-imagined Superman in Sam Liu and Bruce Timms' animated feature *Justice League: Gods and Monsters* released on July 21, 2015.

There have also been numerous changes and re-imaginings regarding the creative approach to the concept of the comic book superhero more recently. Technological innovations including digital and motion comics have opened up superhero/superbeing narratives to a technologically literate audience. Similarly, there has also been an, in some cases total or radical, diversification of approaches to the race, genders, and sexual orientations of typically white, male, and heterosexual conceptions of the comic book superhero. Examples include Brian K. Vaughn's *The Runaways* (2003) which features a multi-ethnic and preference-fluid cast; Simon Baz, the Lebanese-

American homosexual Green Lantern; the Muslim-American Ms. Marvel Kamala Khan; a female interpretation of the God of Thunder debuting in *Thor* Vol. 4, No. 1 (October, 2014); a female interpretation of Loki debuting in *Thor* Vol. 3, No. 5 (January, 2008), the original Captain America Isiah Bradley in *Truth: Red, White & Black* No. 1 (January, 2003) and Sam Wilson (usually known as The Falcon) debuting as the official replacement of Capt. Steve Rogers as Captain America in *Captain America* Vol. 7, No. 25 (October, 2014).

Despite diversification of method, audience, and medium of comic book superbeing storytelling outlined above, I argue that the current theoretical and/or philosophical analyses of comic book superbeings – be they primarily theological, psychological, sociological or historical – tend to relapse into dialectically moral and ethical readings thereof, as predominantly either 'good' or 'evil.'

In “The Real Truth About Superman: And the Rest of Us Too” (2005), Mark Waid describes Superman as follows:

“Superman, the grandfather of all superheroes, is a cultural institution. Even the most elite and insulated intellectuals have been exposed to enough pop culture to be familiar with the Man of Steel and what he stands for. He fights a “never-ending battle” for truth, for justice, and – still enthusiastically after all these years, despite the fact that no one can define it any more – for 'the American Way.' Consequently, he is as close as contemporary Western culture has yet come to envisioning a

champion who is the epitome of unselfishness. The truest moral statement that can be made of Superman is that he invariably puts the needs of others first.” (Waid 3)

Waid's description suggests that the relationship between the character, its power, and its use of thereof are commonly viewed as fundamentally mediated by a moral, and particularly, altruistic ethos. In a section titled “What Is A Superhero?”, Fingeroth goes as far as to suggest that even the most disparate comic book superheroes – the examples he gives are Thor and Batman – are functionaries of the same underlying moral ethic. Fingeroth asks,

“What, then, makes a character a superhero? What does the thunder god Thor have in common with the night-time avenger, Batman? The most obvious things are: some sort of strength of character (though it may be buried), some system of (generally-thought-to-be) positive values, and a determination to, no matter what, protect those values. These are also, interestingly, the characteristic of a villain.... The superhero...has to represent the values of the society that produces him. That means that what, say, Superman symbolizes changes over time. In the 1950s, he may have been hunting commies. In the 1970s, he may have been clearing a framed peace activist against a corrupt judicial system. Either way – the hero does the right thing...more importantly, he knows what the right thing is.” (Fingeroth 16-7)

However, in *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (1992), Richard Reynolds notes

that Superman, or any other super-powered character who chooses to pursue a so-called 'morally righteous' or 'pro-social' agenda, are "by and large not upholders of the letter of the law; they are not law enforcement agents employed by the state" (Reynolds 74). This fact makes Superman's diegetically punitive use of power somewhat paradoxical not only in terms of legal malpractice, but also because it seems odd that a being of power and Otherness would elect to subjugate its power to any ideal that prohibits the full expression of said power and/or Otherness. I argue that the conservative diegetic civic-mindedness of mainstream comic book superheroes/superbeings/costumed crime-fighters like Superman is a direct consequence of an interpellation of superpower into politics. By the term interpellation, I am referring to the process by which individuals are hailed and made subject to an ideological framework that mediates their experience of subjecthood as well as the subjecthood of others. As such, the diegetic disruptivity of Superman's power and Otherness has become entombed in the various political agendas and ideals of extradiegetic humanity reflected in the fictive worlds of the DC multiverse over time.

Over its near century long history, the character has, to varying degrees, also been inculcated as symbol of both extradiegetic and diegetic Jingoistic might. As Reynolds states, one of the results of this systematic conditioning of the character's power and Otherness is that "the set of values [it] traditionally defend[s] is summed up by the Superman tag of Truth, Justice and the American Way" (Reynolds 74). While Reynolds suggests that the phrase

'American Way' is often interpreted in a narrowly nationalistic way, and more often than not rather stands for the humanistic ideals enshrined in the United States' Constitution, the fact remains that these extradiegetic ideals are fundamentally anthropocentric ideals. Consequently, a false equivalence arises because the idea that a diegetic human beings possess the moral or existential authority, sensitivity, or understanding to univocally apply these ideals to the being of a diegetic extra-terrestrial is deeply contestable. The inverse is equally true. The idea that a diegetic extra-terrestrial possesses the moral or existential authority, sensitivity, or understanding to use its power to univocally and supra-legally enforce ideals that are fundamentally other to it against beings that are as alien to it as it is to them is similarly contentious.

In *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006), Peter Coogan provides the following definition of a superhero in the same vein as Fingeroth's interpretation:

“Chapter 3: The Definition of the Superhero – Superhero: noun, plural-roes. A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, powers, or origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is generically distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres (fantasy, science fiction,

detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret. - Superheroic, adjective. Also super hero, superhero.” (Coogan 30)

One can see a pattern emerging that I argue tends to reductively, directly or indirectly, fuse the concepts of superpower, moral and ethical programs of altruism, and pro-social agendas in a way that holds with the demands of moral excellence inherent in a narrowly Judeo-Christian conceptualization of the term ‘hero.’ Regardless of how nuanced a text like *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), *Watchmen* (1986), or *Miracleman* (1985) may be in terms of assessing the tensions inherent within the inter-relationship between the above concepts, in which the radical consequences of the relationship between power, utopia and dystopia are taken to their radical conclusions in characters like Dr. Manhattan, Miracleman, or Superman itself, these ideas are typically only partially engaged with or eluded outright in favor of a morally essentialist understanding of comic book superbeings that has become the principal convention of the genre and character type in the mainstream. This trend is further evidenced in Jeph Loeb and Tom Morris's definition of a superhero in *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way* (2004):

“Let’s start with a simple question. What is a superhero?...Whether he's stopping a purse snatcher, foiling one of Lex Luthor's evil plots, or even deflecting an asteroid from its collision course with Earth, Superman gives

us an ongoing example of what a commitment to truth, justice, and not just the American way, but the genuinely human way should look like. Many other superheroes show us this as well. We're all meant to be active in our creation of good lives, for ourselves, and for the other people around us. We're supposed to be concerned about our communities and our greater world. There is evil to be resisted and great good to be done. Life awaits our best contributions. The superheroes work for not just people who appreciate their efforts, but often for people who criticize and revile them. They don't do what they do because it's popular. They do it because it's right." (Loeb & Morris 28)

In contrast, there are others who do not necessarily make recourse to morally essentialist readings of Superman when defining what the character symbolizes. For example, in "Why They'll Never Let Me Write Superman: Brief, Disconnected Notes on an American Mythology," Warren Ellis describes the character as follows:

"Superman, then, is the agent of modern fable -- the most compelling fable the 20th Century gave us. Soap opera is unworthy of him, and, as has been proved many times, is not big enough to contain him and the central concepts of his story. At the heart of myth and legend is Romance. That is not the same as the weak, whiny demands of soap opera that begin with "characterization" and crap on with demands for ever more levels of "conflict", "jeopardy", "ensemble writing", "tight

continuity" and all the rest of that bollocks. These things are unimportant. Many of them just completely get in the way of the job at hand.

SUPERMAN requires only the sweep and invention and vision that myth demands, and the artistry and directness and clean hands that Romance requires. SUPERMAN is about someone trying their best to save the world, one day at a time; and it's about that person's love for that one whose intellect and emotion and sheer bloody humanity completes him. It's about Superman, and it's about Lois and Clark. And that's all there is. That's the spine. That must be protected to the death, not lost in a cannonade succession of continuing stories." (Ellis)

Ellis's views are important because they suggest that the character's diegetic power and the myriad possibilities it presents in terms of concepts such as onto-existentialism and radical sociopolitics have become subordinate to the various formal, technical and extradiegetically socio-economic demands of the medium in which they appear. What is at stake here, according to Ellis, is the loss of the mythic aspect of the character and its power, which, throughout its publication history, stands in tension with the impulse to turn its disruptive power into the fodder for protracted psycho-dramas. Ellis is not alone in his belief that these various demands have contributed to an over-saturation of comic book superheroes in contemporary popular culture. This is particularly evident in the action-adventure and science fiction genres of contemporary film in which these characters are increasingly subject to a pervasive sense of fatigue. Other

notable commentators holding polemical views against the corrosion of the concept of the comic book superbeing through repetitious tent-pole franchising in relation to Hollywood cinema and its toyetic tie-in merchandising offer vitriolic critiques of what is commonly referred to as 'superhero fatigue'. In an interview titled "The Rise and Fall of the Superhero, 'Alan Moore Takes League of Extraordinary Gentlemen to the '60s'" by Scott Thill, Moore states that,

"Yes, I suppose you could say there is a connection with our earliest fireside stories in which we invented the idea of gods and champions, but if these [superheroes] are our new gods, then god help us. Because I generally think these are pallid creatures invented to entertain children 60 or 70 years ago, and they were perfect at that.... Everything has its season, and I think the season of superheroes has probably endured a lot longer, at least in its current form, than it should have. Yes, if superheroes could somehow return to that incredible rush of invention that once existed when they were originally created, then yeah I'm sure the world would delight in the concept. But in its current form, I think it's a disgrace on all sorts of levels...I think that characters owned by big corporations will also revert to an essentially conservative default position. Whether that's the initially anarchic, spiky and spiteful Mickey Mouse becoming a pants-and-shirt-wearing suburbanite within a decade, or whether it is Superman, who in his first adventures was a New Deal Democrat punching out strike-breakers and throwing slumlords over the skyline.

You only have to imagine what the late '30s were like to see what Superman was originally a symbol of. Those were Great Depression streets filled with people largely dressed in shades of grey and sepia, if the newsreels of my childhood are to be believed. They were trudging through those streets looking for jobs, and Superman was on their side, dressed in vivid primary colours, and could leap above those streets and circumstances. It was an aspirational figure for the ordinary man, and for Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who grew up in Cleveland. That was what Superman was meant to be.” (Moore 2011)

In another 2010 interview with Alison Flood titled “No More heroes for *Watchmen's* Alan Moore,” Moore goes as far as to describe American post-millennial comic book superheroes as symbolic representations or fantasies of tactical, operational and ordinance superiority and the moral and ethical distancing this affords – both in terms of advantages in actual physical distance from a target, as well as the ethical and moral distance from a target. He states,

“I've had some distancing thoughts about them recently. I've come to the conclusion that what superheroes might be – in their current incarnation, at least – is a symbol of American reluctance to involve themselves in any kind of conflict without massive tactical superiority...I think this is the same whether you have the advantage of carpet bombing from altitude or if you come from the planet Krypton as a baby and have increased powers in Earth's lower gravity.” (Moore 2010)

The above commentaries, some of which have been quoted at length, are intended to contextualize my hypothesis that Superman, as a powerful alien, is a fundamentally disruptive character within any diegetic reality that reflects extradiegetic social, historical and cultural reality. My intention with the above overview is to also illustrate that my hypothesis represents but one way of understanding the character as it has been presented throughout its publication history, and that there currently exist different contemporary appraisals of the concept of the comic book superbeing, and Superman more specifically, endorsed by scholars and creators alike.

The predominately historico-cultural approach of current and more established scholars offers valuable insights regarding the history and development of the medium or its characters. The main shortcoming of this approach is that its disproportionate distribution of scholarly attention achieves its insights at the expense of providing sustained critique and speculative analysis of the more future-oriented ideas inherent in comic book superbeings' powers and Othernesses. This leaves the expanding discipline of comics studies in danger of becoming a circuitous academic field saturated with repetitive socio-historical and cultural analysis that reads more as a series of annotated chronologies rather than as dynamic scholarship in which thought-provoking, nuanced and pioneering examinations of comic book superbeings may broadly emerge. My approach is not intended to discredit the historiographical and ethical analyses of comic book superbeings heretofore. Using Superman as a

case study, my goal is to contribute to a type of analysis of comic book superbeings that not only takes the existential and ontological paradoxes of diegetic representations of a comic book superhero's power and Otherness into account, but identifies and explores the consequences of superhero within the context of diegetic earths to some of its speculative extremes.

This project will address this deficit in the field by demonstrating the dialogic interplay between socio-historical analysis and onto-existential concepts pertinent to the study of comic book superbeings and Superman, in particular. In doing so, I will conjoin and expand upon the exhaustive historical analyses of established scholars including Christopher Knowles, Thomas Inge, Larry Tye, and Danny Fingeroth with philosophical and theoretical approaches to ideas concerning powers and Othernesses found in the xenological analysis of Robert Freitas Jr., and Fredric Jameson, as well a comparison of the character Superman against non-mainstream interpretations of the character type found in the work of Pat Mills, Kevin O'Neill, Dave Gibbons and Ted McKeever, and Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson. The ideas of these and other authors will be mediated by two overarching concepts that will form the analytical frame of this project namely, power and Otherness. These concepts are important to my examination of Superman because they offer the most holistic way of examining the radical socio-political and philosophical consequences of the character's being within the context of the history of comic book superhero publication, and the narrative and aesthetic contexts of their respective diegetic earths.

CHAPTER II: SOCIOPOLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS: SUPERMAN FROM THE 1930S TO THE 1990S

Modern comic books emerged in America in approximately 1933. This time was marked by the end of an era of industrialization in the nation. As such, the modern comic book can be viewed as an original and attractive culmination of several mainstreams of national culture and technology. The modern comic book had many revered nineteenth century precedents to follow, the engravings of Gustave Doré's drawings, for example. Were it not for the popularity of such high quality illustrations for popular narratives and novels, early financiers may not have invested in any further explorations of illustrated storytelling. More directly for superheroes, without the readership's interest in folk tales and heroic myth, the concept of the comic book superhero might not either have emerged to establish comics as a financial success, or set one of the medium's most persistent preoccupations. At this time, there was also a high degree of cross-pollination between various platforms of mass culture, the rapidly expanding cultural and artistic influence of motion pictures, for example. What comics were able to achieve, however, was to coalesce the folk traditions and technological changes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America into an appealing form of visual literature (Inge 131).

Before three major 1930s film genres – the gangster, the horror and the

fallen woman – came to influence the American popular imagination, newspapers in late nineteenth century America issued reprinted collections of the most popular comic strips in card-bound covers as promotional items. The first of these was a collection of Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* published in March, 1897. A comparable series of facsimiles devoted to *Foxy Grandpa* (1900), *Buster Brown* (1902), *Mutt & Jeff* (1907) and *The Katzenjammer Kids* (1912) were also produced. As precursors of modern comic books, these early collections were occasionally rather than periodically published. The idea of reprinting coloured Sunday funnies lead to the production of what can be regarded as the first modern comic book. In 1934, Eastern Colour printed thirty-five thousand copies of *Famous Funnies, Series 1* containing sixty-four pages of reprinted Sunday colour strips, which immediately sold out in America's chain stores. The first monthly comic magazine under the same title began in May of the same year. *Famous Funnies* would appear regularly thereafter over twenty years, two hundred eighteen issues, with a circulation peak of nearly one million copies (Inge 140).

Major Malcom Wheeler-Nicholson's National Periodical Publications pioneered the idea of publishing original material in a new periodical format beginning with *More Fun* in 1935. Barring established reprint titles, the direct link between newspaper strips and comic books ended, allowing the latter comics format to develop a tradition of its own. *More Fun* was followed by *Detective Comics* (later DC comics) in 1937. However, it was not until the appearance of

Action Comics in 1938, after Major Nicholson sold the beginnings of DC to Harry Donenfeld and Jack Liebowitz, that the character who would assure the success of the subject matter for thousands of comic books to come emerged. The comics publisher Max C. Gaines re-discovered material which had repeatedly been unsuccessfully submitted to several newspaper syndicates. The creators, two high school students from Cleveland Ohio, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, gave the twentieth and twenty first century one of its most enduring pop-cultural icons. That character was Superman, who immediately took hold of the American imagination, becoming the first twentieth century folk hero. At the time, Superman was a perfect mythological figure for an age of technology which, at its most optimistic, suggested that humanity's destiny was to methodically step beyond every limitation against its intellectual and physical abilities and master the universe (Inge 141).

While most of the earliest comic strips presented humorous or satirical material, the emergence of action-adventure strips effected an aesthetic and thematic turn in early modern comics. This distinctive shift can be noted from Harold Grey's *Little Orphan Annie* (1924) to *Popeye the Sailor Man*, a superhero prototype, premiering in E. C. Segar's *Thimble Theatre* strip in the same year. Similarly, this shift was contemporaneous with Roy Crane's *Wash Tubbs*, which began as a humour strip in 1924, but subsequently evolved into a high-adventure strip. This aesthetic and thematic development was also influenced by the debut of the hard-boiled detective character Dick Tracey in 1931,

presenting science fiction elements and outlandish villains that preceded later comic book supervillains.

In 1929, two separate media – newspaper strips and pulp magazines – came together. This merger was marked by the adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* (1912) into newspaper strip format by Hal Foster. The same year, Dick Calkins adapted Philip Nowlan's *Buck Rogers* (1928) into strip form, resulting in the birth of the adventure comic book strip. This innovation would come to shape much of popular heroic fiction as it was understood by contemporary audiences and soon after it, more recognizable superheroes began appearing. For example, Alex Raymond's creation *Flash Gordon* (1934) gave readers adrenalized imaginings of high adventure, science fiction and the future. The 1940s and 1950s also witnessed a broader expansion of the action-adventure genre in comics in which a concourse of heroes emerged. Notable examples include: Chester Gould's gothic morality play in the detective mode in *Dick Tracy* (1931); Vincent T. Hamlin's synthesis of advanced technology and prehistory in *Alley Oop* (1931); Milton Caniff's deftly illustrated and scripted stories in *Terry and the Pirates* (1934), and his post war offering *Steve Canyon* (1947); Fred Harman's stylized Western adventures in *Red Ryder* (1938); Fran Striker's iconic masked cowboy *The Lone Ranger* (1938) drawn by Charles Flanders; Harold Foster's Arthurian Romance *Prince Valiant* (1937); Alfred Andriola's intelligent detective stories in the *Charlie Chan* (1938) and *Kerry Drake* (1943) strips; Roy Crane's second contribution to the tradition of World

War II image-text narratives in *Buz Sawyer* (1943); Will Eisner's satiric and expertly illustrated showpiece of crime fiction *The Spirit* (1940); Lee Falk's men of magic and mystery in *Mandrake the Magician* (1934) – often referred to as the first superhero – drawn by Phil Davis and, lastly, *The Phantom* (1936) by Ray Moore (Inge 9-10). It was The Phantom who created the visual and narratological model of the modern superhero. He had a secret identity, wore a mask, and was the first comics character to wear a form-fitting bodysuit. During this time, thousands of stories featuring action-adventure tales in the Western, mystery, science fiction and jungle adventure genres, all depicting fantastical heroes and heroines, were published on a regular basis.

COMICS, PULPS AND FILM: THE 1920s AND 1930s

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed important dialogic interplays between pulps and early film that would significantly impact the development of comic book storytelling in the superhero comic book, and the concept of the comic book superbeing more generally. In addition to the pioneering developments of the illustrated book, “the application of colour printing in the newspaper to the comic strip and [the] interest of Americans in mythic figures,” the maturation of film as a form of popular entertainment was instrumental in creating a broader audience for visual narratives in America during this period (Inge 142). An example of film's direct influence on the development of a character that would

subsequently influence Superman can be noted in resemblance between Doc Savage and Clark Gable, an intentional aesthetic choice of Savage's premier cover artist Walter Baumhofer (Fingeroth 40). More broadly, this cross-pollination is evidenced in the formal features of comics' techniques of storytelling. These methods also extend to theatre as “the comic strip draws on many conventions associated with the theatre such as dialogue, dramatic gesture, background or scene, compressed time, a view of the action framed by a rectangular structure and the reliance on props and various stage devices” (Inge 5). Moreover, early comics anticipated most of film's techniques. These include, montage, angle shots, panning, cutting, framing, and the close up. *Buz Sawyer* and *Steve Canyon* are two comic book examples of effective framing and angle shots in early comics (Inge 5).

During this period, film and comic art developed simultaneously. Artists in both media had to solve the same problems in portraying visual narratives independently without being able to make recourse to established precedents and often drew aesthetic and narratological methods from each other. As such, early comic strip panels and sequences can be very cinematic in their use of perspective and point of view. Comic artists often employed cinematic panning, in which the camera/eye/perspective remains stationary but pivots to follow an action, much ahead of the technique's common usage in film making, for example. In addition, traveling or tracking shots, in which the camera moves with the subject, and close-ups or cut-ins, in which a portion of the previous scene is

enlarged in the next as a point of focus, were also developed independently by comics' artists (Inge 143-4).

Once the comic book had proven itself as an innovative and lucrative visual storytelling medium, its characters went on to inspire numerous adventure serials shown in chapters as Saturday matinees. Examples include those based on Superman, Batman, Captain America, Captain Marvel, Spy Smasher, Vigilante, and Nyoka the Jungle Girl (Inge 143). This symbiotic pop-culture intermediality would continue to generate multi-media versions of early mass culture icons. Heroes from comic books appeared in radio programs, movies (features and serials) while simultaneously, movies continued to inspire and galvanize comic writers and artists (Fingerroth 44). Examples of comic strips which would be adapted for the screen included Barney Google, Blondie, Buck Rogers, Dick Tracy, Ella Cinders, Flash Gordon, Joe Palooka, Lil' Abner, Prince Valiant, Red Ryder, and Terry and the Pirates (Inge 143). More recently, the work of modern auteurs such as George Lucas, Luc Besson, and Steven Spielberg has been heavily influenced by comic books. In addition, the work and aesthetic of legendary French *bandes dessinées* artist Jean Giraud (also known as Moebius) has been seminal in the realization of influential modern science fiction and fantasy films. He provided storyboard and concept art for such iconic films as Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* (1997), James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989), and Steven Lisberger's *Tron* (1982), for example. While one may argue that that these early experiments were unable to

keep abreast with innovations in film due to the limitations of the medium, such as limitations of size and visual space, the comic book has still been able to produce interesting and evocative methods of visual storytelling. Armed with only the juxtaposition of sequential panels to create an effect, the ordinary traveling close-up, or use of slow-motion in a sequence to heighten the dramatic impact of a scene became effective aesthetic tools. Brian Bolland and Chas Truog's work in Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* No. 5 (December, 1988), Mike Dringenberg's innovative work in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman: The Doll's House* (September, 1991), and Morrison's ambitious merger of M-Theory and comics in *The Multiversity: Ultra Comics* No.1 (March, 2015) with art by Christian Alamy, are just three of innumerable examples of comics that carry the visual narrative into areas of aesthetic and narratological innovation that the restrictions of film preclude the camera from accessing.

This cross-pollination has taken a largely mono-directional form in recent years. The contemporary DC and the Marvel cinematic universes have come to greatly aesthetically and narratologically influence the narratives of the source material on which their cinematic adaptations are based. For example, the appearance of Matt Fraction and David Aja's Hawkeye in their 2012 run on *Hawkeye* replaced the character's Robin-Hood inflected aesthetic in favour of a more 'practical/tactical' design reminiscent of the character's appearance in Joss Whedon's *Marvel's The Avengers* released the same year. While comics, particularly superhero properties owned by major publishing houses including

DC, Marvel and Image, have increasingly become subordinate to film over the past decade, even creator-owned titles like Mark Millar's *Kick-Ass* (2008), *Nemesis* (2010), *Superior* (2010), *Supercrooks* (2012), *Chrononauts* (2015), and *Empress* (2016) have all had their film rights sold before their completion in comic book form. As such, it would appear some prolific and highly lauded comic book creators are less concerned with writing thematically and aesthetically ground-breaking comics, but rather with creating lucrative, 'filmable' extended story-boards for the massively popular genre of so-called superhero films.

According to Arthur Ekirch Jr.'s *Ideologies and Utopias: The Impact of the New Deal on American Thought* (1969), the extradiegetic socio-political climate in the U.S surrounding the original publication of Superman was irrevocably marked by the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt over Herbert Hoover in 1932. Roosevelt's running platform emphasized that Americans needed to alter their views of the perceived inextricability between the concepts of individual wealth and achievement (Ekirch 73). As children of immigrant Jews, Superman's creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, were directly influenced by this re-evaluation of previous associations of the 'American Dream' with socio-economic prosperity and gain, in particular. As Beth Wenger notes in *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (1996), throughout the 1920s, many immigrants had benefited from the economic boom of the period and its numerous avenues of business and financial success. As such,

immigrant families, like Siegel and Shusters, carried a latent expectation that “America would continue to offer their families opportunities for advancement and security” as it had done in previous decades, therefore instilling hopeful and appreciative sentiments toward America in their descendants (Wenger 1-2). However, following the Wall Street crash of 1929, many Jewish families were left feeling betrayed, which necessarily caused them to reconsider the so-called promise of America. Like many of their contemporaries, Siegel and Shuster, as “[y]oung Depression-era Jews, raised to believe in the promise of America, encountered a shrinking pool of jobs and opportunities and the rise in employment discrimination and university quotas” (Wenger 2). In *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (2008), Hajdu suggests that these extradiegetic hardships manifested themselves diegetically in that even a cursory look at the first ten issues of *Action Comics* illustrate that these early narratives “spoke directly to survivors of the Depression” and dealt with extradiegetic socio-political problems in diegetically extraordinary ways (Hajdu 30). As Daniels notes in *Superman: The Complete History* (1998), in the first issue of *Action Comics* in 1940, Superman “casually dropped in on a wife beater and taught him the error of his ways”, showing the character as an active, superpowered agent of redressing injustice be it macroscopic, institutional or governmental, or microscopic, be it juvenile delinquency or domestic violence (Daniels 22). This early characterization of Superman as a hyperactive and latently Marxist avenger is compounded by the

range of targets of the character's puerile, idiosyncratic concept of justice. Early Superman stories, in both *Action Comics* and *Superman* titles, "found him [stopping] crooked labour unions, drunk drivers, and gamblers" (Daniels 23). This and other early examples of inter-diegesis between the socio-political and cultural zeitgeist of the period and the Superman comics produced therein can be summed up in an interview printed in Daniels' text, where Siegel states that he and Shuster channelled their extradiegetic experiences of the Depression into the diegetic world of the character's burgeoning mythos. He states, "if we wanted to see a movie we had to sell milk bottles, so we sort of had the feeling that we were right there at the bottom and we could empathize with people. Superman grew out of our feelings about life" (qtd. in Daniels 35). Similarly, in a press release in 1975, printed in Fingerioth's *Disguised as Clark Kent* (2007), Siegel acknowledged that the inspiration for the specific creation of Superman was two-fold. On the one hand, his inspiration came from "listening to President Roosevelt's 'fireside chats'," and on the other, from a keen sense of fear "[over] being unemployed and worried during the depression... Hearing and reading of the oppression and slaughter of helpless, oppressed Jews in Nazi Germany... I had the great urge to help... How could I help [anyone] when I could barely help myself? Superman was the answer" (qtd. in Fingerioth 41).

When taken in conjunction with Roosevelt's socio-political ethos, Superman was, from its beginning, a character that symbolized and embodied Roosevelt's New Deal. The New Deal refers to Roosevelt's socio-political that

symbolized the end of laissez-faire individualism, in favour of social democracy, where poverty and unemployment were no longer regarded as acceptable consequences of successful business. As such, “no longer was competition considered superior to cooperation” (Ekirch 107-8). In a post-New Deal America, American business was encouraged to uphold mutuality and collectivism as ideals, as opposed to solely striving for a private monetary success (Ekirch 108). Diegetically, Superman similarly acted in favour of these ideals, lauding those who helped their fellow man, and often violently confronted and punished those who pursued exploitative capitalist ends. As such, Superman “embodied the Roosevelt-era ideal[s] of power employed for the public good” and was instrumental in “[emphasizing] the importance not so much of individual freedom but of economic equality and social security for the nation as a whole” (Hajdu 30).

While extradiegetic 1930s America was marked by feelings of helplessness in the face of large scale socioeconomic obstacles, the diegetic world of Superman offered an alternative that facilitated and redressed the 1930s readership's feelings of extradiegetic helplessness. Within the context of comic books of the time, to many, this meant reading about the exploits of a saviour figure in the form of a comic book superhero character solely, and violently, dedicated to ameliorating readers' experiences of the broader hardships of the socio-political and economic pressures they faced. As Wright notes in *Comic Book Nation* (2001), “the common man could not expect to

prevail on his own in this America, and neither could the progressive reformers who tried to fight for justice within the system,” but Superman embodied the common reader's psycho-emotional need for retribution and recognition by becoming his/her champion (Wright 13).

Perhaps this impressive, almost spiritually reverential, resonance Superman elicited in its early readership was due to the fact that despite Romantic descriptions of expansion and growth associated with this period, Superman stood mostly alone. In 1938, only two other costumed heroes stood alongside it: The Arrow, who followed in the Robin Hood tradition of vigilante bowmen, and the Crimson Avenger, who was basically a copy of The Green Hornet of radio fame, albeit with an altered colour scheme. Simply put, Superman stood alone because none of its market rivals were as powerful or appealing as it was. Thematically and conceptually, these characters lacked superpowers. Aesthetically, they lacked the spectacular flair attributed to Superman's carmine cape, nor were their costumes generally ground-breaking in any way (McCue & Bloom 21). By 1939, more heroes began appearing on newsstands. These first-wave figures included DC's the Sandman, and Timely Publication's (later Marvel Comics) the Human Torch, and Prince Namor: the Submariner. They were followed by a deluge of costumed heroes the following year in 1940, where the concept of the comic book superhero came to dominate the popular consciousness and, by extension, the aesthetic of the medium. Aesthetically, characters' palettes and costumes now came in increasingly vivid

combinations. In addition, illustrative principles such as perspective, elevation, and pictorial space were exaggerated to match the youthful readers' demand for exponentially more spectacular stories. From 1939 to 1940, there were approximately sixty superhero titles on newsstands. By 1941, the number had more than doubled to one hundred and sixty-eight.

Inevitably, demand pressed for more supply. New companies, characters, and publications emerged. One of the most prolific of these new comics' creators was Max Charles Gaines. With close ties to the DC parent company, Gaines created a subsidiary comics line called All-American Comics published under DC's logo. Gaines was shrewd enough to perceive that to rival Superman and the character's almost all-encompassing range of powers, any new character would have to either specialize in a very unique area of expertise, or embody a particularly attractive gimmick. It was also no longer competitive to simply present an otherworldly figure of power serving the principles of 'truth' and 'justice'. The quality of the work became the determinant of its longevity. In terms of longevity, Gaines was extremely successful. He introduced seminal figures and later recurring Justice Leaguers such as The Flash, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman to newsstands as well as the then expanding DC Comics diegesis (McCue & Bloom 26). The continuing partnership between Gaines and DC resulted in the earliest establishment of what is now commonly referred to as a comic book 'universe', a diegetic and/or hyperdiegetic world(s) in which interconnected narratives are bound by internal rules of logic and continuity. As

such, Gaines's All-American line produced the first comic book superteam namely, The Justice Society of America. This milestone innovation was followed by the emergence of even more superheroes from writer/creator teams of early DC Comics and its All-American Line including Sandman, the Spectre, Dr. Fate, Hourman, Hawkman and the Atom. Before rules of internal logic and continuity were rigorously enforced, the initial excitement of these developments inhered in the fact that these costumed vigilantes and superbeings were now able to share a page, a world, a conversation, and their experiences, good or bad.

Superman, as a diegetic champion of the extradiegetically downtrodden, and the character's status as a New Deal avenger resonated with a broad spectrum of 1930s American readership. As such, Superman was soon the most popular comic book character on the market. At a time when most comic book titles sold approximately 200,000 to 400,000 copies monthly, *Action Comics* regularly sold 900,000 copies per month. More impressively, the *Superman* title comics sold an average of 1,300,000 copies per issue (Wright 13). Thematically, Superman was still targeting petty crooks, corrupt politicians and any who exploited the honest working man by the close of 1941. As Daniels notes in *DC Comics: A Celebration of the World's Favourite Superheroes* (1995), at this point in the character's publication history, Siegel and Shuster had successfully characterized Superman as "a tough and cynical wise guy... [who] took to crime-fighting with an adolescent glee" and whose self-described goal was to help the downtrodden and the helpless (Daniels 9-11).

CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTION IN EARLY SUPERMAN COMICS

There are clear and variegated examples of Superman's disturbing ruthlessness and violence in its pursuit of 'justice' from the very beginning of the character's publication history. *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 2 (July, 1938) features a vehemently anti-militaristic Superman. This might strike some modern readers as uncharacteristic of the same character who would subsequently be identified as the ur-icon of extradiegetic American jingoism. However, in the story, Superman learns that a powerful munitions magnate, one Norvell, has been financing a corrupt lobbyist who has been attempting to establish a market for Norvell's arms in the war-torn South American republic of San Monte. As the narrative progresses, Superman confronts Norvell and is fired upon by machine-gun wielding guards. Superman dispatches them easily, adding the further humiliation and terror of wrapping the barrels of their weapons around their necks (Siegel 19). Threatening to "tear out [Norvell's] heart with [its] bare hands," Superman coerces him to board a steamliner and make for San Monte to witness and gather evidence of the horrific consequences of his criminal enterprises. While Superman ultimately ends the conflict, there is one notable scene in which Superman returns Lois to the safety of their ship after saving her from a nefarious scheme that put her in front of a San Montean firing squad.

Superman interrupts a soldier torturing a prisoner. The character's response to the cruelty and injustice it witnesses is to raise the torturer above its head and, after promising to "give [him] the fate [he] deserve[s]," throws the soldier beyond view, apparently killing him (Siegel 27). This scene underscores the inextricable link between Superman's sense of fairness and ruthlessness, intimidation, and even murder in its earliest adventures. The character's early displays of retributive justice are also deeply ironic. Consider Figure ii. below, for example. In *Superman* No. 2 (September, 1939) "Superman Champions Universal Peace!", one Professor Runyan develops a deadly toxic gas that is able to bypass safety measures such as gas masks. Ryman demonstrates the efficacy of the gas on a monkey, its instant death impressing Clark Kent who is reporting on the professor's discovery. In the midst of the interview/demonstration, thugs lead by one Bartow break into the lab and steal the gas and its formula in order to be sold to one Lubane, an arms dealer profiteering from a civil war in the fictional country of Boravia. While Superman certainly acts decisively to end the conflict in the last instance, the character does so by destroying a munitions factory and allowing a begging man, albeit guilty of war crimes and the manufacture and sale of chemical weapons, to die excruciatingly, drowning in his own lungs. Furthermore, in order to vouchsafe the treaty, Superman uses intimidation by destroying the pillars of the summit building in which negotiations are being held to force the compliance of the recalcitrant representatives of the two warring nations. As such, Superman's method of 'championing universal

peace' at this point in its diegetic history leaves either no survivors, or little time or space for compromise.



Fig. i. taken from *Superman Vol. 1, No. 2* (September, 1939). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Joe Shuster.

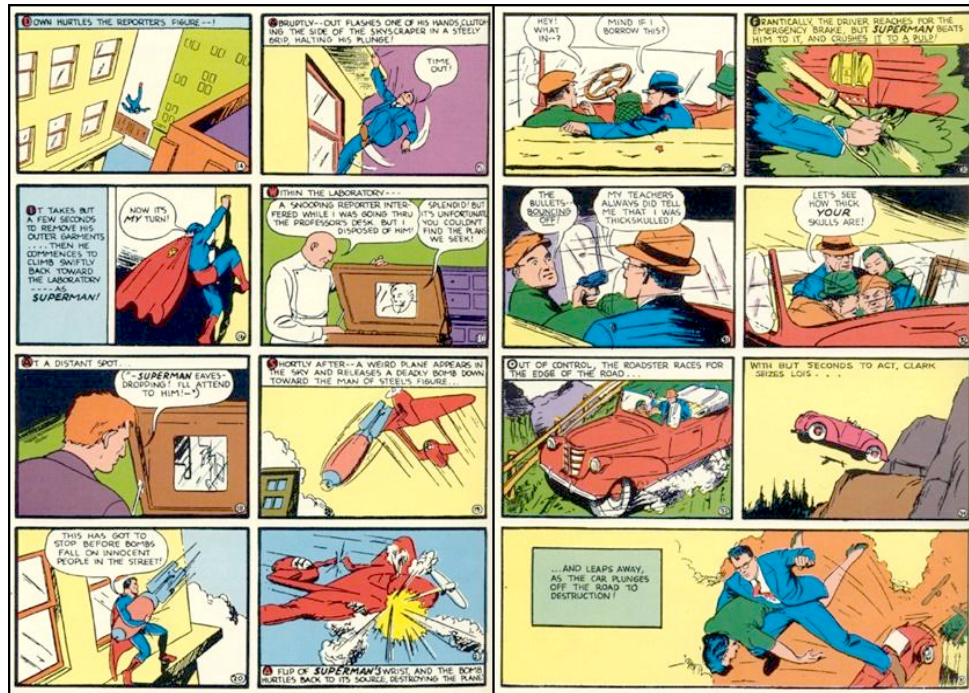


Fig. ii. taken from *Superman* Vol.1, No. 4 (March, 1940). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Paul Cassidy.

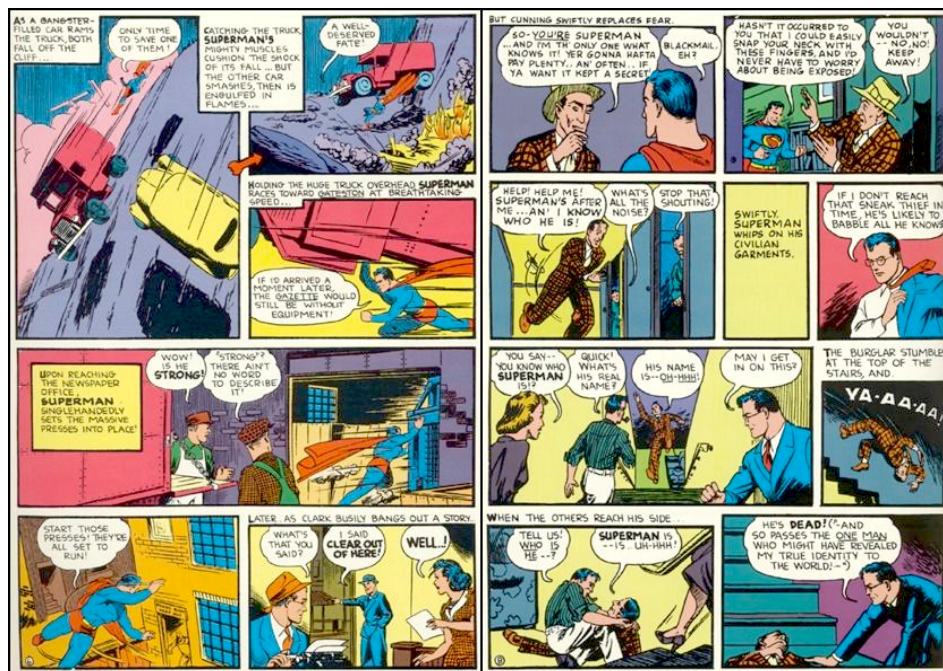


Fig. iii. taken from *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 6 (September, 1940). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Paul Cassidy.

protect innocent civilians on the ground, it gives no consideration whatsoever to the fact that the falling wreckage from its ill-thought retaliation will present the exact same peril to those it claims to be acting in protection of.

The second page of Figure ii. shows Clark Kent employ reckless, and indeed underhanded, tactics in the story “Luthor's Undersea City” featured in the same issue. In the story, two of Luthor’s thugs ambush and kidnap Lois and Clark at gunpoint during their investigation of Luthor's involvement in the aforementioned earthquake. Clark endangers all the lives of its fellow passengers by tearing off the vehicle's steering wheel and crushing its emergency brake with one hand. After the thugs open fire on Clark, it knocks them unconscious by smashing their skulls together, and taking Lois underarm, consciously leaves the roadster to plummet off the cliff-side to be destroyed with the thugs in it.

Similarly, the first page of Figure iii. shows Superman faced with a dilemma of two vehicles simultaneously falling off a cliff in the story “Terror In the Trucker's Union”. One of the trucks belongs to The Daily Planet, transporting printing presses, while the other is transporting criminals. Not only does the character elect to save the presses over human lives in spite of its prodigious speed, while scanning the wreckage it states that the horrible bone-breaking and fiery deaths the criminals suffer is well deserved. In contrast, the second page of Figure iii. shows a disturbing Machiavellian example of the character's early violence. In the story “Mission to San Caluma”, a cunning thief witnesses Clark

Kent's transformation into Superman, the first time this happens in the character's history. The thief attempts to extort Superman, offering it a choice to either pay an annual sum, or have its secret revealed to the world. In response, Superman does not negotiate or even attempt to reason with the man. Instead, it threatens him, telling him that it could snap his neck and rid itself of the problem. Frightened, the thief flees from the room before Superman changes back into Clark and gives chase. The thief arrives at the top of a flight of stairs and declares to know Superman's secret identity. Somehow, perhaps with the assistance of superspeed, Clark manages to arrive at the bottom of the stairs ahead of the thief to 'witness' the thief's 'mysterious' fall and subsequent death before being able to reveal Superman's secret. While the thief's death may seem coincidental, I argue that the combination of the ambiguous panel evidence and Superman's powers suggest that the thief's death was deliberately orchestrated by Superman itself.

The second page of Figure iv. shows perhaps the most overt example of the character deliberately using its power to kill innocent people. In the story "The Gay City Plague", a plague ravishes Gay City causing its citizens to literally disintegrate, whether by a slight touch or a full collision. A wave of panic ensues, leaving the citizens of Gay fearful of leaving their homes. Clark is dispatched to cover the story in Gay whereupon its arrival, Gay's commissioner Jim Stanley informs it that an anonymous tip led him and his staff to believe that the cause of the plague is centred around an area of Gay called Gargoyle Towers. Superman

investigates, but the building explodes as it arrives, catching it in the blast. Unharmd, Superman attempts to 'protect' the innocent bystanders in danger of being crushed by falling debris. It does so, however, there is a discrepancy between what the caption in the sixth panel describes Superman doing and what the image in said panel actually depicts Superman doing. Clearly, the character does not throw the I-beams into an empty lot, but directly and consciously on top of the pleading bystanders below, crippling or killing them. No ancillary support is given as to why it would inexplicably, casually and horrifically crush people it acknowledges as innocent. There are two important things to note in Figures ii-iv. First, while seen as a staunch humanist, early characterizations of Superman portray the character as extremely cavalier about causing or allowing the loss of human life, innocent and guilty alike. Second, Superman's early violence was not limited to the character's Superman persona in that the above examples, four of many, clearly illustrate that both early "Superman" and early "Clark" used lethal violence as a premier problem solving method.

Action Comics Vol.1, No. 3 (August, 1938) sees the character pursue a greedy industrialist who is unwilling not only to compensate miners crippled in a cave-in, but also to acknowledge that the safety standards of his mine were sub-par to begin with (Siegel 35-6). Despite only seeing Superman in costume once in the narrative's total ninety-five panels, it nevertheless again consciously endangers lives, innocent and guilty alike, in order to mete out its own form of retributive justice. In this story, after confronting the mining tycoon and being

dismissed from his office, Superman disguises itself as a miner and is intentionally captured on the tycoon's estate while trying to disrupt a ball being held there. Conveniently, the tycoon and his guests voluntarily relocate from the safety of the manor to the danger of the unsafe mine. While the guests revel therein, Superman causes a second cave-in to, paradoxically, expose the mine's initially hazardous condition. While Superman is able to procure a confession from the repentant tycoon, its elected method knowingly endangers the lives of the entire party, regardless of their individual guilt or innocence. This story clearly illustrates the character's deep resentment toward the selfishness and willed ignorance of capitalist upper echelons who exercise their wealth and social status over and against the proletariat, as well as how unnecessarily far early Superman would go to achieve this end. While there are thousands of still exiting, novel and intelligent ways the character could have used its powers to stop greed and corruption in the aforementioned stories, it consistently employed violence, death, intimidation and other unethical means in pursuit of ethical goals. For example, *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 4 (September, 1938) sees Superman drug and kidnap the innocent Tommy Burke, a low-ranking football player. Superman impersonates him in order to use its powers to single-handedly win games and expose the team's corrupt coach (Siegel 49-50).

The character's retributive justice did not discriminate in terms of the age of its victims either. In *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 8 (January, 1939), Superman frees a group of juvenile delinquents from police custody after being sentenced

to two years in a boy's reformatory for their involvement in a crime ring, returning them to their derelict tenements (Siegel 103). It goes on to threaten and severely beat the ringleader responsible for their arraignment, subsequently running him out of town under pain of further violence (Siegel 101-2). Superman later learns that the youths it saved are repeat offenders, catching them attempting another burglary. Superman decides that the best way to deter them from crime is to traumatize them by leaping on live electrical wires while carrying the entire gang underarm, effectively countermanding the liberal avuncular image of Superman many modern comics creators disseminate and modern consumers idealize. Dismayed at their enjoyment of the character's preventative attempts after their initial shock subsides, Superman declares that their delinquency is not entirely their fault but symptomatic of the moral and socio-economic dilapidation experienced and internalized in the Depression-era slums in which they were raised. Superman decides that the only way to remedy the problem is to destroy the slums in order to catalyse the government to rebuild the area with improved apartment projects. The National Guard is deployed to stop Superman's path of seemingly wanton destruction. Aided by a bombing squadron scrambled to destroy Superman, the decaying slums are razed. Subsequently, the wreckage is cleared and new project buildings are erected and the authorities, including the police and the army, publicly declare war on Superman.

In *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 11 (April, 1939), Superman destroys an oil well and then sets it ablaze to thwart a corrupt brokerage firm selling worthless

stock in another non-existent oil well (Siegel 151-2). *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 12 (May, 1939) sees Superman tackle the issue of reckless driving. In the process, the character breaks into and partially destroys a radio station where it addresses the citizens of the unnamed city with a declaration of war against homicidal drivers. It then destroys the cars of traffic violators in an impound lot, and proceeds to destroy a car manufacturing plant for using substandard materials in its vehicles, paying little heed to the innocent workers fleeing from the crumbling edifice. In a final act, Superman abducts the city mayor and dangles him on a window ledge of the city morgue. Superman forces the mayor to view the maimed dead bodies of those killed in automobile accidents, blaming him for their deaths.

In *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 13 (June, 1939), Superman pursues the Cab Protection League, an organized crime cabal that victimizes independent cab companies. At the independent Carlyle Cab Co., the character witnesses a cab league goon threatening an innocent cab owner. Superman knocks the racketeer out after he pulls a revolver. Superman then takes the unconscious racketeer up in its arms, presumably taking him to prison. While leaping through the air, Superman's unconscious victim revives and draws a knife, trying to stab it. The knife shatters on impact, but distracts Superman from executing a neat landing, crashing into a nearby building instead. The racketeer is dropped in the process, landing on his head and neck from a great height, killing him instantly. In response Superman remorselessly states that, "if he hadn't tried to stab me,

he'd be alive now. - But the fate he received was exactly what he deserved!" (Siegel 185).

To modern readers, Superman is typically characterized as a smiling, cheerful, and idealized protector of capitalist socio-economic ideology. A paradoxically benevolent Big Brother figure who uses its power to ensure that the moral structures and apparatuses of Western civilization are safeguarded and reproduced. Valued in this way, Superman serves to placate the undeniably disruptive and dangerous nature of its being. However, this reading of the character only comes into prominence *after* the early 1950s. As illustrated above, from its debut and throughout its early adventures in *Action Comics*, the character bears little resemblance to the reactive and morally static archon it would later become. Rather, from the beginning, the character's power was unambiguously depicted as being caught in a cycle of violence and retribution in which it was used dangerously, lethally, destructively and in an actively disruptive way. Superman is shown to be prone to anger, where intimidation and violence are essential methods in its problem-solving repertoire. In *Superman: The Unauthorized Biography* (2013), Weldon describes the Superman of this time as "a tough guy in an unnamed city who beat up bullies gleefully, with no compunction about roughing up criminals if it meant getting his way" (Weldon 25). From *Action Comics* No. 1 (1938) to *Superman* No. 1 (1939), Superman was essentially a super-powered Nemesis, an agent of revenge, using its power to enact swift and often cruel retribution against the corruption of the power elite

on behalf of the disenfranchised and alienated proletariat.

Early Superman is not a particularly good representative of the corrective/punitive apparatuses of the State, in so far as respecting due process and the protocols that protect its procedures are concerned. As its early adventures attest, Superman was a truculent agent compelled by bullish violence. This can be noted not only in *Action Comics*, but in *Superman* titles as well. Peter B. Lloyd's essay "Superman's Moral Evolution" draws particular attention to the fact that the Superman of this period's 'judicial' methodology bypassed the very constitutional rights central to the idea of the American way of life, which it ostensibly serves and protects. In enacting its destructive brand of retributive justice, the character simultaneously, and often mistakenly, defaced the legal rights of its targets with the same laissez-faire attitude that it destroyed vehicles, firearms and infrastructure with. During this time, Superman never arrested a perpetrator or suspect in anything resembling a legally acceptable fashion, making its distinction from the State's ethos and processes of fair trial and presumption of innocence abundantly clear. As Siegel's early portrayals of Superman show, the character's procedure for arresting American citizens was often to punch them in the face, which it refers to with satisfaction as "a good old-fashioned sock in the jaw" in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 11 (July, 1941), "to throw them with concussive force, or knock their heads together, or throw guns at them" (Siegel 169; Lloyd 186).

The point here is that the combination of Superman's frequent errors of

judgment and single-handed and powerfully violent approach to justice are both frightening and dangerous. While the character's physical and psycho-emotional uncanniness might make it easy to forget, Superman is neither human, a citizen, nor an official public servant of many of the diegetic worlds it appears and acts in. More accurately, the character is an obsessively civic-minded volunteer, acting with the impunity its multiple identities and power afford it. This is problematic because the character's violence cannot be remanded as malfeasance. "Even where a suspect is guilty" as Lloyd rightly notes,

"the legal code of America does not permit arbitrary ill-treatment. The law dictates that a person must be presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty; and, when found guilty, subject to the specific punishments laid down by law and sentenced by a judge. The early Superman inflicted whatever pain he deemed appropriate on suspects, and he saw nothing wrong with it. These were not one-off aberrations, done in the heat of the moment. Superman's violence toward suspects was consistent. Almost every arrest he made in the Golden Age involved assaulting the suspect."
(Lloyd 187-8)

The 1930s and 1940s were extradiegetic periods of both American and global instability and crisis that incubated and catalysed the emergence of a vengeful, powerful and active Saviour/avenger figure distilled in the character of Superman, its diegetic actions and the ideology governing them. As such, the character's early use of its power was a method of diegetically redressing

imbalances in socio-economic means, using its radically disruptive power to rearrange the power dynamic and socio-economic praxes that pervaded the extradiegetic miasma of the Depression. The desire the character satisfied in readers of its early adventures should not be thought of as that of moral dissemination, ethical rearmament or the valorisation of a Judeo-Christian ethic of 'goodness.' Instead, early Superman diegetically addressed extradiegetic anxiety and need for restitution on behalf of the powerless against the exploitative actions and institutions of the powerful, primarily in socio-economic terms. The character's brand of justice, from its inception, was a mixture of retributive and restorative, rather than abstract and moral whereby extortion, greed, racketeering and various other types of injustices were seen to have a direct effect on individual victims and their communities, as opposed to violating idealized principles enshrined in the legal apparatuses of the State.

SUPERMAN AND WORLD WAR II

The Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbour while Superman Vol. 1, No. 13 (November, 1941) was on newsstands. Pearl Harbour drew the United States into a war that would irrevocably alter the nation's self-image, as well as its perceived place in the world. These global extradiegetic events would eventuate coextensive diegetic changes in Superman and the comic book superbeing mythosphere by extension. While the character had begun as the

adolescent power fantasy of two awkward boys who longed for something more than physical and socio-economic powerlessness, Superman would become the power fantasy of an entire nation at war. However, Superman's vast powers became an inter-diegetic editorial problem when America joined the war in December 1941. Readers speculated that if allowed, Superman could win a world war swiftly and unaided.

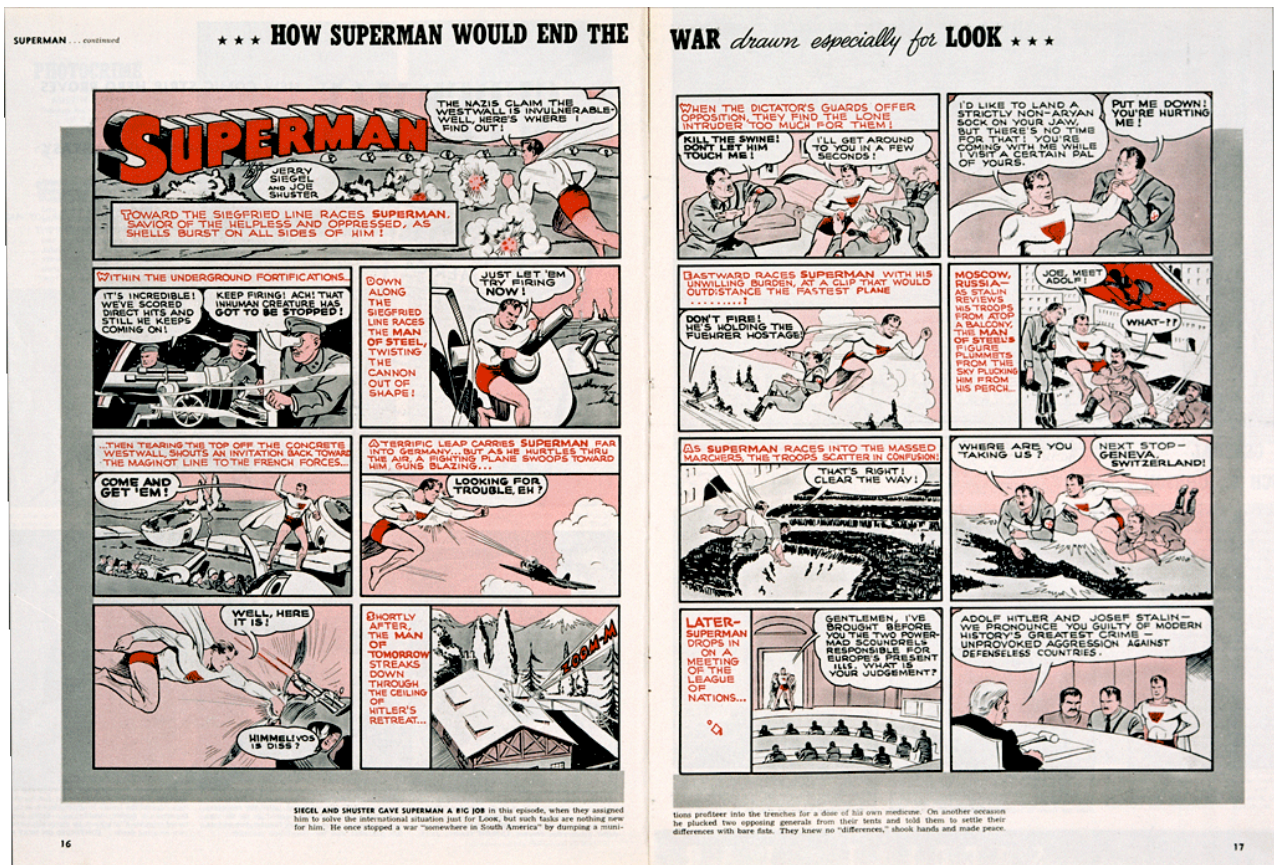


Fig.v. taken from *Look* magazine "How Superman Would End The War" (February, 1940). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Joe Shuster. p.g. 16-7.

After witnessing the character single-handedly reform an arms dealer and make peace with two warring factions of San Monte (which was an analogue for the ongoing Spanish Civil War at the time) in the first two issues of *Action Comics*, the necessity of Superman's active involvement in the American war effort would seem self-evident. It was clear by the time America joined the war, the character was a destructive creature, an organic doomsday device capable of disrupting the advance of any and all enemy war machines if fully weaponized and unleashed. The exigency surrounding this conjecture was further underscored in the February 27, 1940 issue of *Look* magazine (see Figure v. above). In "How Superman Would End the War" written by Siegel and illustrated by Shuster, the reader witnesses the disruptive efficacy of a Kryptonian in pitched battle. The character twists Nazi anti-aircraft guns into knots of scrap metal, intercepts Japanese fighter planes, and even captures diegetic versions of Hitler and Stalin, presenting the two dictators before the League of Nations for judgment.

While this imaginary story was published before America had officially entered the war, once America joined the conflict in earnest, Superman stepped back from active soldiering altogether. In contrast, other patriotic icons filled pages and screens of wartime America with rallying calls to arms. Examples included: Ace pilots Hop Harrigan, and Blackhawk; Rip Carter and the Boy Commandos; Captain America; Captain Marvel; the Sub-Mariner; and the Human Torch. Despite this brigade of super servicemen, Superman refrained

from the war. Young letter writers and editors of *The Washington Post* and *Time* magazine asked why this was the case. With “How Superman Would End the War,” Siegel, Shuster, and publishers Harry Donenfeld, and Jack Liebowitz (owners of National Allied Publications, later DC Comics) knew they had created an expectation for their superpowered and morally righteous hero to intervene on behalf of the Allies, and while the pages of *Look* magazine had spectacularly demonstrated how Superman could win a diegetic world war alone, now that the lives of extradiegetic U.S. soldiers were at risk, the character could no longer be so cavalier about the horrors of war.

The inter-diegetic tension inaugurated and sustained by radical differences in the powers, bodies and Otherness of Superman, its rivals, and allies, on and off-page becomes clear when they are compared as combatants. Unlike its comrades on the front, Superman was always-already operating at a different standard. Axis bullets did not bounce harmlessly off the chests of American soldiers and any story featuring a smirking Superman who could effortlessly destroy Nazi machine gun nests and mortar positions risked inappropriately trivializing battlefield trauma mortal soldiers experienced (Weldon 54). While the expectation of a non-superpowered individual, regardless of how heroic, may have been to harass, disrupt and/or kill some of her/his enemy's troops, infrastructure and supply lines, Superman's diegetic abilities created an extradiegetic expectation that it simply could not fulfil. Even an attempt and failure of total victory would make Superman appear hollow, and

therefore a liability to American troops' morale (Tye 58).

This problem of the character's paradoxical diegetic indefatigability and extradiegetic impotency would come to be known as "Superman's Dilemma."

The April 13, 1942 issue of *Time* described the problem as follows:

"Superman is now in a really tough spot that even he can't get out of. His patriotism is above reproach. As the mightiest, fightingest American, he ought to join up. But he just can't. In the combat services he would lick the Japs and Nazis in a wink, and the war isn't going to end that soon. On the other hand, he can't afford to lose the respect of millions by failing to do his bit or by letting the war drag on." (Time 1942)

The solution, often attributed to editor Murray Bolintoff and Shuster (who. Having failed his own pre-induction eye test was declared unfit for duty), was to have Superman officially, albeit ironically, declared unfit for battle. In a series of newspaper strips in 1942, Clark Kent attempted to enlist in the Army. During the character's eye exam however, it 'accidentally' read a chart in the adjoining room with its X-Ray vision. While no other physical problems could be found with Clark, the Army doctor declared it 4-F, unfit for the combat services of the United States military (Tye 58-9). This diegetic solution succeeded, satisfying the entire extradiegetic spectrum of Superman readers from youthful comic enthusiasts, to the editors of *Time* magazine. In the same 1942 newspaper strip, Superman further distanced itself from the battlefield by declaring that the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Air force were capable of overcoming their

enemies without the intercession of its transcendent power. Instead, the character dedicated its powers to the home front, battling saboteurs and fifth columnists who were thought to be attempting to destroy the production of war materials in America. In effect, Donenfeld and Liebowitz decided to turn Superman into a symbol, a morale-boosting icon, leaving the extradiegetic war to be fought and won by human soldiers who Superman referred to as "the greatest of all heroes, the American fighting man!" (Weldon 54).

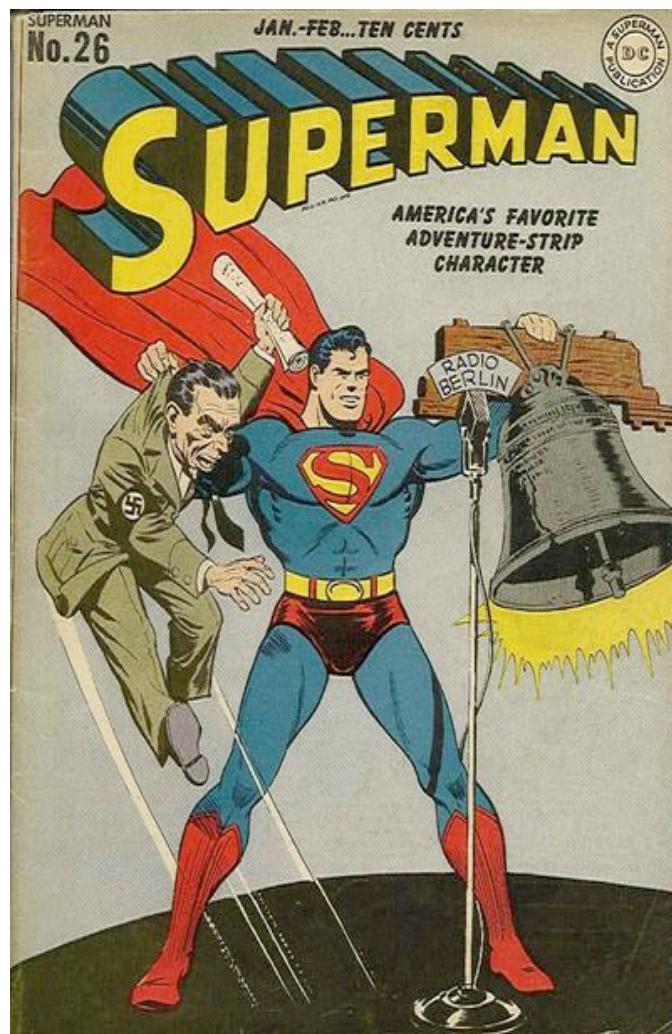


Fig. vi. taken from *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 26 (January, 1944). Written by Bill Finger, illustrated by Ira Yarbrough. Cover.

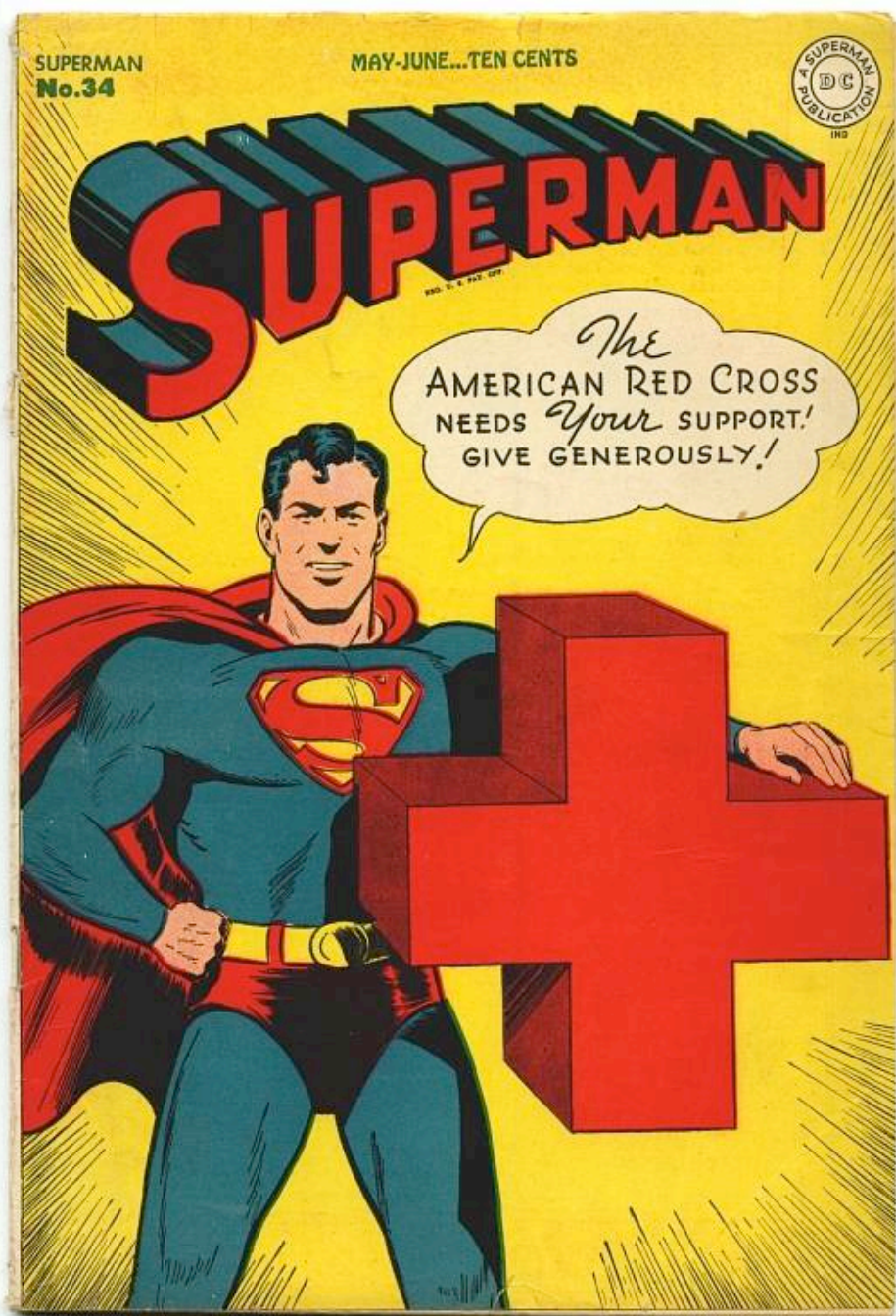


Fig. vii. taken from *Superman* Vol.1, No. 34 (May, 1945). Written by Don Cameron, illustrated by Sam Citron. Cover.

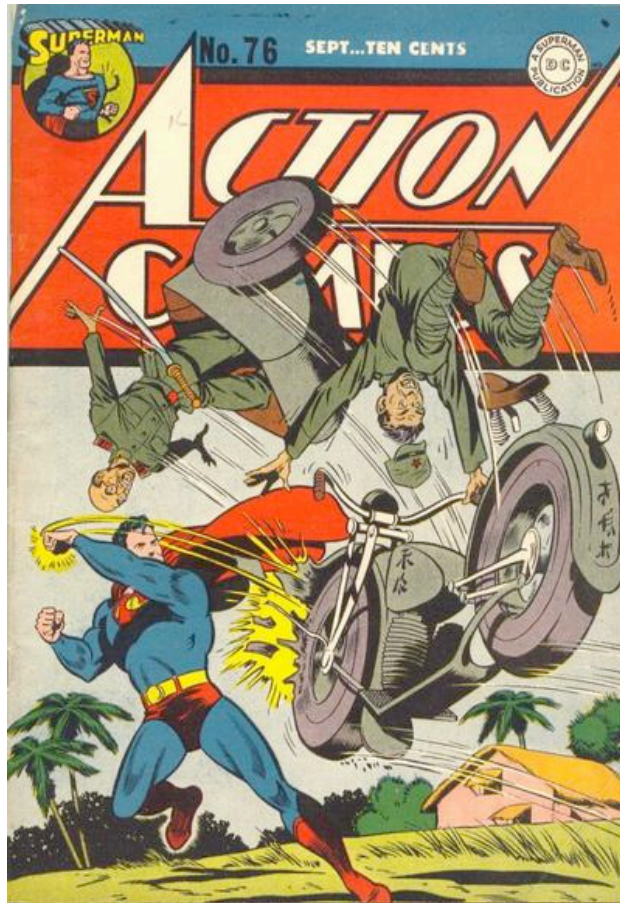


Fig. viii. taken from Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 76 (September, 1944). Illustrated by Ed Dobrotka. Cover.

From 1942 until the end of World War II, Superman's direct diegetic confrontations with Axis powers, or participation in the extradiegetic war effort more generally, were primarily confined to comic book covers. For example, Figure vii. above shows Superman as a mascot of the Red Cross, while Figure viii. depicts Superman as an active combatant on the Pacific front. Similarly, Figure vi. shows Superman dangling Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels by the scruff of his neck while ringing the Liberty Bell, an iconic American symbol of independence, over Berlin radio waves. This particular

image can be seen as a response to Goebbels's vitriolic critique of the character as a stooge of its Jewish creators and financiers in the then weekly SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* on 25 April, 1940. Despite how attractive and attention-grabbing these covers were, however, they were largely, if not completely, unrelated to the content within. On them, U.S. servicemen and women were presented in conjunction with nationalistic and patriotic imagery and iconography to rally behind. As such, Superman's cover artists produced propagandistic depictions of the character even before the United States entered the war. For example, on the cover of *Superman* Vol.1, No. 12 (September/October 1941), a beaming Superman proudly walks arm-in-arm with a U.S. soldier and seaman. However, once America officially entered the war, *Superman* and *Action Comics* cover artists were blatantly jingoistic with their aesthetic and iconographical treatment of Superman's power and Otherness. For example, the cover of *Superman* Vol.1, No. 14 (January/February, 1942) shows the character posing in front of a giant shield bearing stars and stripes with a Bald eagle perched menacingly and majestically on its forearm. Similarly, the cover of *Superman* Vol.1, No. 17 (July/August 1942) shows Superman standing atop the Earth lifting Hitler and Hirohito by their necks in a pose that suggests that it is about to smash their skulls together. On the cover of *Superman* Vol.1, No. 18 (September/October 1942), Superman is shown astride a missile as it descends on an unseen enemy position. Aside from the price, date, issue number and the Superman title, the only other visible text reminds

readers that "War savings Bonds and Stamps Do the Job on the Japanazis!", further emphasizing both the character's destructive efficacy and its association with the American war effort. *Superman* Vol.1, No. 23 (July/August 1943) depicts one of the most famous wartime images of Superman. The perspective is from within a German U-Boat in which two Nazi sailors look through a periscope. They see two things. The first, the Allied vessel they have just sunk. The second, Superman swimming toward them with a wrathful look on its face. The cover of *Superman* Vol.1, No. 24 (September/October, 1943) depicts Superman in its iconic pose, left arm akimbo, feet apart, chest out, proudly and heroically holding a billowing American flag. In the background, an idealized New York City, the extradiegetic model for the diegetic city of Metropolis, sits peacefully at either dusk or dawn in the shadow of Superman's protection.

This jingoistic aesthetic also appeared on the covers of *Action Comics* from 1941 to 1945. Renowned Superman artists such as Wayne Boring, Joe Shuster, Fred Ray, and Jack Burnley consistently depicted the character attacking Axis pill-boxes, destroying enemy tanks, or dismantling enemy submarines. The mandate of these cover images was to conflate the concept of embodied superpower, as represented by Superman's martial efficacy, with the idea of the socio-political dominance of American ideology. This attempted synthesis was achieved primarily aesthetically, by creating iconographic, geometrical, and symbolic (including colour) equivalence between Superman's cape and the American flag: between the red, yellow and blue and the red, white

and blue. Donenfeld and Liebowitzs' cover artists were successful in this regard because the homogeneity between Superman and Americanism took hold in the American consciousness. As a result, the character was no longer seen as Other, no longer a Kryptonian seeking asylum on Earth, nor did its power or body serve any master save the State. At the beginning of the war, Superman could have been accurately described an extremely popular children's character. However, by the time World War II concluded, the character was regarded as both an American, and a significant American icon. As such, the wartime history of Superman's mythos portrays the character as an exemplar of successful cultural assimilation (Weldon 55-6).

Though the character's jingoistic depictions featured extensively in *Superman* and *Action Comics* titles throughout the war, the fact that the most direct and patriotic depictions of Superman were ostensibly confined to the covers of its titles makes the character's diegetic war effort appear peripheral or cosmetic. The covers bore little relation to the comics' content, making Superman's status as the greatest fighting American distant and exterior. Furthermore, in the months following the United States' official entry into the war, Superman stories took on a gradually, yet perceptibly, more whimsical tone. While the character's antebellum adventures featured spectacular feats in quotidian settings, the content of Superman's stories during the war came to include slapstick humour, bad puns and increasingly bizarre plots. The character was no longer seen or depicted as an active and dangerous New Dealer. Its

stories were now set in the realm of pure escapist fantasy (Weldon 60). During World War II, DC's newly instituted editorial board decreed that Superman was no longer to engage in both the acts and levels of violence it had before the war. As a result, the character became less aggressive. Instead of unleashing its power in the pursuit of retributive justice, it came to rely on its reputation and physical presence to dissuade criminals and evildoers where it had once employed terror and threats of or direct physical violence to overcome them. During the war years, Superman had been de-clawed whereby the character's dangerous anti-establishment disruptivity was turned into an institutional apparatus. No longer an alien Other, onto-existential agitator, catalyst for new modes of being, radical subversiveness of any kind, or socio-economic and existential turbulence, the character became a placid entertainer.

The period of World War II drastically changed Superman. Not in the way it did its diegetic peers, like Blackhawk, The Losers or the World War II iteration of Task Force X, who would return from diegetic simulacra of the Pacific and European theatres of operation as combat veterans. Instead, during the war years, Superman encouraged readers to buy war bonds and save stamps, plant Victory gardens, donate blood and to collect scrap metal. Superman's patriotic image was cultivated domestically whereby the most powerful American comic book character up to and including the war years functioned as an auxiliary unit to buttress national morale. By 1943, there was little to no trace of the vengeful and violent Superman of pre-war comics. This process of interpellation, here

understood as the character's diegetic self-recognition as an instrument of both the police and military State apparatuses, as well as American nationalist ideology,

"smoothed Superman's rough edges and shaped him into something safer, more trustworthy. His social conscience morphed into boosterism. His sardonic smirk became a genial grin. Once hunted as a vigilante 'mystery man,' he now began working alongside the police. There was a war on, so the time for [socio-political reform] was over. Where once he agitated and chafed against the status quo, Superman was now determined to reinforce it." (Weldon 55)

Superman and its diegetic colleagues served a very specific function during the war. These characters offered colourful diversions from the horrors and difficulties of war, foreign and domestic, while simultaneously serving to distil American anxieties about the world's socio-political tumults by making them simple and assailable. The character's narratives and those of its peers repeatedly reduced the complexities of global warfare to dialectical categories of good (the Allies), and evil (the Axis Powers). Whenever Batman, Superman or Wonder Woman inevitably thwarted the fascistic machinations of the Axis powers and their acolytes, be they goons, scientists or spies, the reader could safely, certainly and cathartically experience a simulacrum of total victory/resolution in a reassuring diegetic proxy war.

Simultaneously, however, the character's power, body, and Otherness

were undergoing changes: it was getting stronger. By *Superman* Vol.1, No. 16 (May/June, 1942), Superman went from being able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, to being able to hover in mid-air, to being able to fly, and move at light-speed. *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 47 (April, 1942) depicts a Superman who had graduated from bending steel bars and smashing cars, to being able to tunnel through mountains with its fists alone. Aside from speed and strength, the character's cognitive abilities had increased as well and in *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 62, (July, 1943), the reader learned that Superman possesses a "super-brain." The most important aspect of these increases of the character's power to note is that while the war years kept Superman's power and Otherness in reserve in existential and socio-politically revolutionary terms, instead of de-powering or maintaining the character's power-levels, its overall potency was paradoxically and exponentially increased. Its power was a facet of the character that Donenfeld and Liebowitz needed to consume in acts other than warfare, yet it became more powerful in stasis, an accumulation or stockpiling of power, with no consumptive challenge or channel to discharge said power in or through.

Superman's diegetic increase in power directly reflected the extradiegetic tension of America's increasingly conflicted feelings concerning nuclear devices, their power and who had access to them. However, the extradiegetic atomic threat was not reducible to a single extra-terrestrial being because following World War II, human beings also possessed the power to destroy a world in

similar ways that diegetic superbeings did. In *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 101 (October, 1946) for example, Superman is driven temporarily insane by an evil syndicate's secret chemical compound. As a result, the character goes on a global rampage, destroying everything in its path until a nuclear test blast in the Pacific Ocean breaks the compounds' thrall. Similarly, in *Action Comics* Vol.1, No. 124 (September, 1948), Superman is made temporarily radioactive after being caught in a nuclear reactor explosion. This forces it to keep its distance from Metropolis, which in turn triggers a crime wave in its absence. Despite DC's wartime fiat, these particular stories illustrate that Superman's creative teams still equated the disruptivity of its body with atomic power. Both were presented as devastatingly powerful forces that had undeniable utopian and dystopian potentials.

SUPERMAN AND TACTICAL POST-WAR POSTERITY

The decision to keep Superman in reserve during the war was one of DC Comics editor Jack Liebowitz's riskiest albeit profitable decisions. While nearly all other comic book heroes who were diegetic combat veterans either faded in some way or disappeared entirely after the war, the reintegration into a peacetime society was a problem for extradiegetic and diegetic soldiers alike. Figures including Hop Harrigan's popularity waned because they were charged with providing an escape from the horrors of war. After the war however, their

association with wartime America made them mournful symbols of the realities of death, atrocity and loss the nation was trying to recover from. The DC editorial board's decision to keep Superman as an ancillary, as opposed to an active, combatant would come to pay large dividends. This tactical posterity allowed the character to change synchronously with a domestic market that would still be consuming comics after the war concluded.

Both the character as an icon and the nation it represented went through a coextensive, proportional process of development during World War II. Extradiegetically, America came to have a vibrant and malleable economy, which proved effective enough to forge a military industrial complex powerful enough to assist her allies in disabling the Axis war-machine. Diegetically, Superman had grown stronger, able to defeat any enemy foreign or domestic. In short, the stronger America became, the stronger Superman became. However, the expansion of the American military industrial complex before and during the coming Space Race changed ideas concerning what the human race was, for better or worse, then capable of. Humanity, as a species, had grown from ballistic to nuclear, from mechanical and chemical to atomic. In response, Superman had to necessarily evolve to overtake the expanded public imagination, whose prevailing boundaries had literally been blown apart during World War II. As such, the increase of humanity's extradiegetic power needed be matched and superseded in the superbeing's diegetic representation of power. In this way above all others, Superman's unison with the American public

was fine-tuned during the war years (Tye 64).

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT AND THE COMICS CODE

The early superhero comic book depictions and characterizations of power and Otherness engaged in socialist redress against capitalist exploitation, as they were in early Superman comics, were not universally accepted. As early as 1940, comic book critics, both foreign and domestic, regarded the popularity of the medium as a malignant threat to the moral/ethical ideologies and psycho-emotional well-being of American youth. After World War II, where juvenile delinquency was at an all-time high, Superman and other notable DC characters, particularly Batman and Wonder Woman, were openly indicted by various moralists for the rise in juvenile delinquency in America during this period. For example, the literary editor of the *Chicago Daily News* Sterling North stated that “unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the 'comic' magazine.” Similarly, the Christian publication *Catholic World* asked, “What's Wrong with the 'Comics'?” to which the answer it offered was that “the influence of these comics over the popular mind is one of the most striking – and disturbing – phenomena of the century.” Of Superman, the article claimed that “in a vulgar way this fantastic character seems to personify the primitive religion expounded by Nietzsche's Zarathustra. ‘Man alone is and must

be our God,' says Zarathustra, very much in the style of a Nazi pamphleteer.” Commensurate allegations also came from as far afield as Moscow. The children's novelist Korny Chukovsky stated that “the word superman, as is known, comes from the ideological inspirer of the German fascists, Nietzsche” and that “mass fascisization of the children fully corresponds to the perspectives of the present bosses of America.” In 1949, the cultural critic Gershom Legman added that “the Superman formula, is essentially lynching” whereby Superman “invest[s] violence with righteousness and prestige...fists crashing into faces become the court of highest appeal... really peddling a philosophy of hooded justice' in no way distinguishable from that of Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan” (Legman 39).

In an attempt to pre-empt and mitigate further aspersions of this kind, numerous comic book companies, including DC and Timely (Marvel) assembled their own teams of specialists to morally and legally legitimize their products. This created an Inquisition atmosphere which in 1948 even lead to children being encouraged by parents, pedagogues, and clergy to pile their comics in schoolyards and burn them (McCue and Bloom 29). On March 2, 1948, ABC Radio's *Town Meeting on the Air* ran a special issue show titled “What's Wrong with the Comics?” in which James Mason Brown of *The Saturday Review of Literature* inflamed the institutional attack on comics. His arguments compounded the arguably hysterical concerns of American parents and guardians of the period with his famous statement that comics were “the

marijuana of the nursery; the bane of the bassinet; the horror of the house, the curse of kids and a threat to the future”, literally driving home the point (Mason Brown 1948). That same year, the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy held a symposium in which the now infamous Dr. Frederic Wertham, senior psychiatrist for the New York Department of Hospitals, gained notoriety and acclaim. Ostensibly in the service of the well-being of American youths, Wertham basically charged comics as being psycho-emotionally corrosive in their undermining of morals, their glorification of violence and their alleged encouragement of aberrant sexual aggressiveness in their readership. Wertham's attacks rallied community guardian groups, PTAs, and other mass media to his cause. He even toured the nation giving presentations on the topic, as well as publishing fear-mongering articles like his 1953 “What Parents Don't Know About Comic Books” some of which featured in popular and influential publications of the period, such as *The Ladies Home Journal*.

Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) presents his most antipathetic attack on comics. While now regarded with ardent criticism, specifically regarding how Wertham did not employ proper scientific research methods, manipulated and even fabricated evidence in support of the remonstrations compiled in his text, it was nevertheless taken seriously at the time of its publication, even becoming a minor best-seller. *Seduction of the Innocent* claimed that there were direct correlates between comics and “every kind of social and moral perversion imaginable, including sadism, drug abuse,

theft, murder and rape” (McCue and Bloom 30). While Wertham's tenuous and often spurious ‘pathology of comics’ mostly spearheaded attacks against crime and horror titles, many superheroes were also aggregated into his incriminations. Concerning superheroes, Wertham asked “what is the social meaning of these supermen, superwomen, super-lovers, superboys, supergirls, superducks, super-mice, super-magicians, super-safe crackers? How did Nietzsche get into the nursery?...Superheroes undermine respect for the law and hardworking, decent citizens” (Wertham 15). To Wertham, Superman was nothing but a super-fascist, describing the character as follows:

“Superman (with the big S on his uniform – we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.) needs an endless stream of ever-new submen, criminals and “foreign-looking” people not only to justify his existence but even to make it possible. Superman has long been recognized as a symbol of violent race superiority. The television superman, looking like a mixture of an operatic tenor without his armour and an athlete out of a health-magazine advertisement, does not only have “superhuman powers,” but explicitly belongs to a “super-race” [...] It is this feature that engenders in children either one or the other of two attitudes: either they fantasy themselves as supermen, with attendant prejudices against the submen, or it makes them submissive and receptive to the blandishments of strong men who will solve all their social problems for them – by force.” (Wertham 34; 97)

Similarly, for Wertham, Bruce Wayne and Dick Greyson were nothing but a catamitic fantasy, and Wonder Woman a sadistic lesbian (Wertham 193). Despite the convenience Wertham serves as a scapegoat for the industry's troubles during this period, one must keep in mind that Wertham was a product of the paranoid spirit of the McCarthy era. While Edward Murrow contested and criticized the ethos and contradictoriness of McCarthyism and the Red Scare on television, the entire comics industry was suspected of having and/or promoting un-American tendencies and immoral agendas at the time. The State's reaction in 1954 saw the establishment of series of Senate Committee hearings, the State against the comics industry, in which notable figures including head of EC Comics William Gaines and Milton Caniff stood trial. At the close of the hearings in September 1954, most companies in the industry joined to form a voluntary body called the Comics Magazine Association, followed by the creation of the Comics Code Authority; a self-regulating body intended to prevent external agencies controlling their economic and artistic interests. In essence, The Code "prohibited the portrayal of kidnapping, concealed weapons, nudity, vampires, smut and seduction, while encouraging respect for parents, the sanctity of marriage, good taste, decency and established authority" (McCue & Bloom 32). The combination of Wertham's anti-comics campaign and the establishment of the CCA created the most prohibitive era for American comics, marking the end of an initial period of experimentation and expansion of ideas concerning power, the body, and Otherness as embodied in the narratives and aesthetics of comic

book superbeings/costumed crime-fighters. I argue that Wertham and other puritanical moralists of his time were not disquieted by comic book superheroes because these characters were exceptionally or absolutely immoral in any kind of entrenched way, but because they represented at most a celebration and at least a conscious engagement with the ideas and possibilities inherent in uncontrollable and/or transgressive types of power they represented.

SUPERMAN FROM THE LATE 1950S TO THE 1960S

The socio-political and economic climate of extradiegetic post-war America greatly differed from those of wartime America. Following the end of World War II, strong economic demands, both foreign and domestic, rejuvenated the American economy, fuelling a new age of peaceful economic prosperity. The economy was booming, which centralized the experiences and well-being of a successful white, middle-class America. As the Depression began to dissipate from the collective memory, the national conception of American success was defined by high-consumption, leisure-oriented private lifestyles. In order to fulfil this pleasure-seeking ethos, many Americans moved from urban centres to new, safer suburbs. According to David Ames's "Interpreting Post-World War II Suburban Landscapes as Historic Resources" (1995), in pre-war America, approximately seventeen to twenty percent of the nation's population lived in city suburbs. However, this figure increased to over

forty percent in the 1950s (Ames 3). The quintessential aesthetic of 1950s suburbia was often one of “picturesque” middle to upper-class development (Ames 2). As Lynn Spiegel states in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (2001), the socio-political, cultural and economic focus on wealth and leisure during the decade manifested itself through the fact that many upper-class suburbs also included country clubs and golf courses (Spiegel 3). Similarly, Daniel Gray notes in “The Cold War and The Eisenhower Era (1945-1960)” (2004) that amenities like these were fulfilments of then new President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s emphasis on prosperity, leisure and enjoyment (Gray 2).

This preoccupation with socio-political, cultural, and economic prosperity signalled a re-emergence of American global dominance. Mary Caputi notes in *A Kindler, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (2005) that during the late 1950s, America emerged as “a leading player in the international arena,” recovering from the Depression to possess one of the strongest international post-war economies (Caputi 11). America's perceived success in the war had also influenced both Americans’ sense of economic and military power, as well as the nation's sense of moral probity and ideological certainty. When Eisenhower became president in 1953, American citizens believed that they had “a clear sense of what it [meant] to be an American” and morality was a privileged aspect of that identity (Caputi18). In his 1953 inaugural address, President Eisenhower affirmed that morals patriotism, and national strength

were all inherently connected, stating that “moral stamina means more energy and more productivity, on the farm and in the factory. Love of liberty means the guarding of every resource that makes freedom possible—from the sanctity of our families and the wealth of our soil to the genius of our scientists” (Eisenhower 1953; 1995). This ethos placed a premium on productivity, patriotism and the sanctity of the nuclear family and, as such, succinctly sums up the socio-political and cultural world view of 1950s America. Being that Superman was viewed by many pre-war and wartime readers as an embodiment America’s values, the character would necessarily need to diegetically reflect these new extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and economic conditions in order to remain relevant.

Gerard Courtail notes in “The History of Marvel Comics” (2000) that while the American sense of security and nationalism grew during the 1950s, comic book readers presumably felt less of a psycho-emotional need to be “saved.” Keep in mind that by the 1950s, America had manufactured and used the world’s first atomic bomb, further instilling a sense of not only economic but also military superiority in a polis that no longer felt an exigent need to be saved. This was compounded by the beginning of the Space Age with the launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957 that affirmed the supra-terrestrial aptitude of humanity’s industrial and intellectual faculties. As a result, superhero comic sales dropped considerably in the post-war years, with many superhero titles (including Captain America, the Human Torch, and the Submariner from Atlas Comics) cancelled due to low

sales (Courtial 2). This socio-economic waning also effected Superman comics whereby “Superman (along with many other superheroes closely associated with the war effort) had gone into temporary decline” due to the emergence of new approaches to comic books and comic book superheroes more generally (Daniels 70). In response, DC Comics attempted to create several new strategies and titles to try and appeal to the then new post-war readership by emphasizing narratives and aesthetics that focused on humour and science-fiction. This can be noted in the emergence of the science-heroes of this period, represented chiefly by characters like the re-imagined Flash and the Green Lantern who notably championed a socio-political ethic that upheld the idea of a strong centralized government that represented a successful middle class. Reversing the socio-political ethic of their 1940s forbears, who championed a liberal Rooseveltian ideal by vilifying covetous corporate executives, “the new science heroes were proud servants of the military industrial complex” (Knowles 138). While the emergent and re-imagined veteran heroes of this period could be described as obtuse, Knowles argues that these new interpretations of comic book superheroes offered readers two things lacking in American popular culture at the time namely, a positive and optimistic vision of society, and, simultaneously, heroes worth emulating (Knowles 138). Characters like the Flash and the Green Lantern reflected the new demands of the superhero comics consumers of the era, which differed starkly from consumer demands during the comic book industry's relative infancy in the preceding decade.

Following the Comics Code, Superman's Rooseveltian characterization could not exist as it had before. In view of the character's violent and supra-legal pursuit of its personal configuration of justice, the censorship of the character's anti-authoritarian ethos necessarily altered the late 1930s, early 1940s concept of "Superman" (Hajdu 293). In Siegel's and Shuster's early populist stories, Superman was a diegetic socialist avenger who acted on behalf of the extradiegetically disenfranchised oppressed by corrupt politicians and/or law officers. After the Comic Code, the government in Superman stories would come to be viewed as not only fundamentally "right", but unassailable. The Code also necessarily altered the acceptable content for Superman's narratives. During the 1930s and 1940s, Superman's narrative and aesthetic action depicted the character engaging in or responding to violent situations involving the subsequently banned portrayals of knife, gun and any other type of seemingly excessive violence enacted in contention with legal strictures. In the 1950s, such story-lines became unacceptable. This post Code censorship enforced new publication guidelines for the industry, and Superman more generally, that prohibited the destruction of private property.

Following the censorship of the Code, DC Comics' editor Mort Weisinger had the difficult task of keeping Superman relevant during a period where superhero comic book readership was in steep decline following the war. During the Depression, the character diegetically engaged in the socio-politics of extradiegetic situations in a fantastical way, including labour and union issues,

domestic violence and international politics. However, following the war, the character's primary readership were Caucasian middle-class boys, whose families were economically and socially sound. As Caputi notes, the post-war standard of living had not improved for “a person of colour or the poor” (Caputi 17). As such, for most of Superman’s primary readership, the Depression seemed a thing of the distant past. Weisinger and his teams of creators had to attempt to keep young readers interested with other narrative-aesthetic strategies. According to Weisinger’s story-plan, the new Superman needed to be fast-paced and “bring out a new element every six months” (Daniels 103).

In order to accommodate both the new 1950s audience and the mandate of the Comics Code, Weisinger decided to review the narrative and aesthetic focus of the character's stories by adding fantastical, science-fiction-based elements to Superman stories, including the re-imaging and expansion of Superman's weaknesses in order to create narrative tension and conflict without necessarily relying on knife or gun-wielding villains. Aside from the development of the “Imaginary Story” line, Weisinger's most employed method to achieve this sense of narrative and aesthetic diversity and novelty was the use of kryptonite, which made its first appearance in comics in 1949, interpolated from the *Superman* radio show which ran from 1942 to 1949 (Daniels 106).

The extradiegetic socio-political and cultural atmosphere of 1960s America was also one of intense change and struggle. Beginning with peaceful civil rights rallies in the early 1960s, the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The*

Feminist Mystique in 1963, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, and the urban riots in the late 1960s, the systematic gender, race and economic disparities of the nation were unavoidably brought to the forefront of the American consciousness. The sense of socio-cultural disillusionment, anger and anti-authoritarianism that followed was further compounded by the Vietnam War, which incited numerous mass gatherings, protests and youth rebellion against a conflict that was viewed as immoral and unnecessary by many of its detractors at the time. As such, Superman, a character that was by then broadly regarded as an embodiment of the status-quo that reflected the 1950s ideals of unassailable American arms and economic superiority, unimpeachable authority and moral supremacy, was deeply at odds with the zeitgeist of the 1960s. While the socio-political and cultural unrest of the 1960s emerged primarily from the youth and the socio-economically disadvantaged, DC Comics' editorial mandate governing the production, promotion and publication of Superman comics, as well as the characterization of what had by then coalesced into a 'traditional' understanding of the character, remained relatively unchanged during this period. As such, the fact that the character symbolized the status-quo of the McCarthy period in a way that no longer resonated with the socio-political climate of America during the Vietnam War caused sales of Superman titles to falter as they had after the end of World War II (Eagan 90). As a representative of a narrowly defined 'American Way' predicated on whiteness, the socio-economic prosperity of the middle-class and the idyllic aesthetic of suburban life,

the extradiegetic atmosphere of the Vietnam era saw the emergence of different voices, perspectives and, therefore, readerships during this period. As a result, the static 1950s characterization of Superman that appeared to be inextricably linked to the values of a bygone era was at risk of losing all relevancy when compared against the generational shift in values, interests and goals of the American readership.

As Bruce Shulman states in *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (2001), the socio-political and cultural shift from the 1960s to the 1970s was primarily characterized by broad paradigmatic changes in that “the last days of the Sixties signalled the end of the post-World War II era” (Shulman 4). By the end of that decade, the “unchallenged international hegemony and unprecedented affluence” that Americans had grown accustomed to following World War II had disintegrated (Shulman 6). As Lloyd, Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach note in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives* (2003), America’s global status as a cultural, economic, and military leader declined due to international opposition from other nations including Italy, East Germany, Canada, and France, particularly with regard to the Vietnam War. The combined turmoil of international tension and unrest as a consequence of radical domestic social movements, including the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement, caused America to adopt a more isolationist ethos (Gardner and Mausbach 175). Similarly, Calvin Jillson notes in *Pursuing the American Dream:*

Opportunity and Exclusion Over Four Centuries (2004) that these socio-economic, political and cultural changes were also reflected in the fact that there was a national increase in literacy, with many Americans completing secondary education and pursuing tertiary education. This was also accompanied by a diversification of the labour force whereby women, minorities and immigrants, who were typically marginalized in the McCarthy era, “moved into the economic mainstream” (Jillson 234). The increased representation of women in the work force and mass popular culture at the time also necessarily altered the national conception and valuation of the nuclear family, as well as the suburban lifestyle. As June Sochen highlights in *Cafeteria America: New Identities in Contemporary American Life* (1988), the 1960's saw women, in particular, increasingly attempting to “forge identities apart from their families” and achieve success as independent and valued workers (Sochen 95). Moving away from the 1950s strictures of the nuclear family, in which each member of the average white, middle-class suburban family was expected to participate in the delineated framework of American values, the 1960s saw a dissolution of these socio-cultural structures, resulting in a redefinition of success from being primarily familial, to success coming increasingly associated with individualism, self-expression and actualization. As such, the once turbulent youth of the 1960s were growing to become the new generation of American adults whose participation in national socio-economics, politics and culture altered the American values of the preceding decade (Shulman 2). In this way, the

extradiegetic readership of comic books also necessarily changed from the 1960s to the 1970s.

SUPERMAN IN THE LATE 1960s AND 1970s

In an important sense, Superman was paradoxically most and least compatible with the ideals of this period. While the character's power, as both boon and bane, engaged with the potentials and fears of the Atomic Age, its diegetic Otherness reflected America's extra-terrestrial aspirations during the extradiegetic Space Age. Despite this, Superman's narratives during this period typically elected for a grounded, stifled, subservient and domestic approach toward its Otherness, and a recalcitrant and nervous handling of its power which, ironically, reached a zenith in this period. At this point of its publication history, the character was, symbolically, much like a nuclear device in a nation's arsenal. With this deterrent in place and supreme power assured for the nation it served, instead of using that power to change a world, the character often employed its power for bizarre and petty purposes during this time.

Many of Superman's adventures during this period dealt with 'Imaginary Stories' in which the character's powers were conveniently, and to varying degrees of severity, disrupted so as to allow Superman to be completely domesticated. One particular trend in these Imaginary Stories saw various narratives that dealt with 'the end of Superman's history' through the device of

marriage, which also suggests that the measure of an ideal or utopian world in post-war America was reflected diegetically by diminishing the necessity for a superpowered hero of any kind. As such, I contend that from the early 1930s to the mid 1970s, the character's power and Otherness both diegetically depreciate in order to conform to an extradiegetic post-war American ideal of a settled and lawful life. Additionally, this also lead to a revaluation of the concept of the comic book superbeing from an icon of power and nationalist ideology, to a parodic and comical device as Mark Cotta Vaz notes in *Tales of the Dark Knight* (1989), stating that it is a

“small wonder that by the time the war ended, many superheroes found it hard to go back to busting bank robbers after the intensity of fighting the Axis aims of world conquest. The war in comic books despite its early promise, its compulsive flag waving, and its incessant admonitions to 'keep 'em flying was, in the end lost...from Superman on down, the old heroes gave up a lot of their edge.” (Vaz 36).

While the new science heroes of the late 1950s were proud servants of the military industrial complex, some of the most bizarre and interesting Superman stories ever written come from this post-war period. I argue that the oddity of these narratives is a direct result of the attempts of both writers and artists to diegetically re-situate the character's radically physical power and Otherness to mirror an extradiegetic technologically leaning, post-war American society. While Superman's powers had ironically increased during the years of a

war it did not directly participate in, this battlefield absence also meant that it was not able to exhaust its accrued might in any conflict that could absorb said power. Therefore, I argue that such an excess of power resulted in excessive narratives that attempted to consciously mitigate or defer the character's power and Otherness.

WEISINGER, ONTO-EXISTENTIAL EXPANSION AND RETRACTION

Mort Weisinger's tenure as editor on *Superman* from 1946 to 1970 was paradoxical. On the one hand, under Weisinger's control, the character's abilities ballooned to "godlike dimensions" and as such, "Superman's comic books developed into a fantastic mythos that owed less and less to any standard of reality... Weisinger's Superman flew through suns at the speed of light, pushed planets into space, and travelled through time" (Wright 60). Just like post-war America, Superman under Weisinger's editorship, was portrayed as all-powerful and nearly unstoppable. On the other hand, this period of the character's publication history was also marked by innovations that significantly disrupted the disruptivity of the character's power and Otherness. Alterations made to Superman's cast and themes resulted in a diffusion of the value of these foundational aspects of the character through increasingly outlandish situations and plot devices. Noted comics writer Otto Binder was also instrumental in realizing Weisinger's ideas in narrative form. As Michael Eury

notes in *The Krypton Companion* (2006),

“Krypto, the Super-Dog, the Legion of Super-Heroes, Brainiac, Supergirl, and Elastic Lad were the brainchildren of Otto Oscar Binder (1911-1974).

In collaborations with and sometimes independent of his brother Earl Andre Binder (1904-1965), Otto authored numerous pulp and science-fiction stories under the pen name “Eando Binder...Otto Binder's capricious storytelling wonderfully lent itself to Superman's imaginative landscape, especially with the eccentric tales he wrote during the early years of Jimmy Olsen's titles. Binder's flair for the fantastic was honed during his 12-year stint on Fawcett's Captain Marvel franchise, where he co-created Mary Marvel and Black Adam...Additional Superman classics penned by Binder include “The Witch of Metropolis” (*Lois Lane* #1, Mar-Apr. 1958), the first comic book appearance of Bizzaro (*Superboy* #68, Oct. 1958 and *Action* #254, July 1959), “The Wolf Man of Metropolis” (*Jimmy Olsen* #44, Apr. 1960), and “The Story of Superman's Life” (*Superman* #146, July 1961).” (Eury 83)

Under Weisinger's editorship, DC established what were then new diegetic features of the Superman mythos that modern readers now regard as inextricable from the character itself. These included the creation of the Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen spin-off titles *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* and *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen*. Furthermore, the invention of Supergirl, Krypto the Super Dog, the Phantom Zone, the Bottle City of Kandor, the Legion of

Super-Heroes collectively offered readers various explorations of the culture, and history of Krypton, as well as the provenance of the various types of kryptonite which became crucial elements in the character's narratives during this period.

With the invention of the Phantom Zone, Superman was no longer an interstellar orphan and had to share the once singularity of its power and Otherness with both its cousin Kara Zor-El (Supergirl), and its new-found Kryptonian enemies, including Jax-Ur, General Zod, and later Faora Hu-UI. Superman now also had a superpowered pet with the same powers as its master, including flight, physical invulnerability and a human level intelligence. Furthermore, The Bottle City of Kandor allowed Superman to interact with other, albeit shrunken, Kryptonians, affording it opportunities to explore its history, people and culture without having to revoke the familiar setting of a diegetic earth. Having access to Kandor, Old Krypton's capital city populated by thousands of Kryptonians, further diffused the character's sense of uniqueness, rendering its particular type of Kryptonian Otherness increasingly unremarkable.

It is also clear that various writers and artists have agreed that the Weisingerian expansion of the Superman mythos had an effect on a sense of the character's uniqueness, Otherness and the power and uncanniness thereof. Consider again the following responses given during Eury's roundtable discussion taken from *The Krypton Companion* (2006). Eury asks his participants "some believe that Weisinger's expansion of Superman's super-

powered family weakened Superman's uniqueness. Agree or disagree?" (Eury 211-235). Roger Stern states that "it definitely did" and that "by the time Mort retired, it almost seemed as though more Kryptonians had survived the destruction of their planet than had died there" (Eury 211-235). According to Stern, this move was motivated by a desire for increased revenue in that expanding the character's mythos in this way "added character and potential titles to [Weisinger's] growing editorial fiefdom" however, Stern suggests that "all of those super-dogs, cats, monkeys, horses, rates, bats, aardvarks, and gorillas just watered things down" (Eury 211-235). While Jon Bogdanove broadly agrees that Weisinger's expansions made Superman less unique as a character who represents Otherness and power, he does suggest that such a move "does not mean it was inappropriate for its time", and that it also served to provide the character's mythos with "some charming kitsch, and plenty high-Freudian weirdness" (Eury 211-235). This view, that Weisinger's additions to the mythos added depth and scope to the character are seconded by Jeph Loeb, who states that "you're talking about the guy who brought Supergirl, Bizzaro #1, and Krypto back into the mythos after Mr. Byrne wiped them from memory. Cool is cool. Those ideas were cool and still are. Look at the success those characters have found" (Eury 211-235).

Conversely, other participants suggest that the character's uniqueness is unimportant. For example, David Mandel answers Eury's question by stating "did [Weisinger's expansions] make Superman less unique? Technically, yes,

but told so many great stories using those Super-characters plus the bottle City of Kandor and even Krypto. It's all about the stories. Whether he was unique or not didn't matter" (Eury 211-235). The narrative limits of a mythos that focuses on the experiences of a single character is another reason cited for viewing Weisinger's expansions as positive developments. Alex Ross states that "you could even argue by the time that he was doing this, Superman had been creatively tapped of what could be told of the one man from Krypton living in the world by himself" (Eury 211-235). Similarly, Karl Kesel states

"...Superman being the Last Son of Krypton is not what makes him unique. There are a ton of characters that are alone and cut off in one way or another. Isolation and alienation are strong themes in a lot of super-hero comics. But when you add in Supergirl and Krypto and Kandor and the Phantom Zone - you have a family and even more: a displaced community of refugees (touching on that immigrant theme again), and that's unique in comics [...] but – whether done on purpose or not – the underlying idea of Superman as the Moses-like de facto leader of a lost people was brilliant, if you ask me." (Eury 211-235)

More complicatedly, Kurt Busiek both agrees and disagrees with Eury's statement, stating that

"there's a power to Superman being the last survivor of Krypton, to being the "Last Son" in the sense that there are no other survivors. That sense of isolation, of loneliness, of being the only being like himself in the entire

universe, has a grand and operatic power that works really well. At the same time, though, there's a different kind of power, of emotional zing, to Superman at the centre of an extended wed, with Supergirl, the Phantom Zone criminals, the Bottle City, and yes, even the dog and the monkey. That Superman is the "Last Son" in the sense that he was born of Krypton's destruction, that he was the last child born on Krypton. Zod was born earlier, Supergirl somewhere else, and so on. But there's a richness, a feeling of Superman as the centre of a Pantheon, that we get out of the Weisinger Super-Family approach, and that's made for a lot of good stories." (Eury 211-235)

Interestingly, Mark Waid suggests that Weisinger's expansions can be viewed as a reward to the character for its years of diegetic service. He states that

"it's all about how you frame the word "unique." The trade off - which, I'll argue with my dying breath, was based on sales figures, obviously the right move to make – was this: Kal-El was no longer "uniquely" the last survivor of Krypton (though he hadn't been since about 1950). Instead, he was surrounded by a replacement "family" that was unique in its charm. There was something subconsciously very poignant about watching Superman, the loneliest man in the universe, be rewarded [for] his virtue with a cousin and a dog." (Eury 211-235)

The range of above opinions on Weisinger's impact on the character's mythos are varied. That said, there are residual themes that reoccur in connection to

Wesinger's expansions, namely solitude/isolation, loneliness, family and displaced communities, rewards for service in the form of familial company and the narrative limits of a mythos centred on a single character. As such, during this period of innovation and creative expansion, the character's power and Otherness are consistently disrupted in two ways. First, directly, in the sense that Superman is often exposed to a plot device which necessitates the temporary loss or disruption of the efficacy of its power and Otherness. Second, the transformative or disruptive device bypasses Superman altogether and only affects the character's supporting cast, therefore making Superman's power and Otherness largely peripheral.

Moreover, this reduction of the character's remarkability was inextricable from the inclusion of kryptonite in *Adventure* Vol.1, No. 252 (September, 1958) which not only made Superman mortally vulnerable, but devices like red kryptonite, with its variegated effects on the character's behaviour, also gave writers and artists a wide range of scenarios – humorous, thrilling, romantic, or melodramatic – to explore and develop Superman/Clark Kent as rounded characters. In the meta-textual *It's a Bird...* (2004), Steven T. Seagle describes the latent function of kryptonite in the form of a mock-1950s advertisement as follows:

“KRYPTONITE!!! Are you a VILLAIN trying to defeat the ULTIMATE man?
Are you a WRITER trying to unlock the CORNER you've written yourself
into by creating a SUPERMAN? A being so MIGHTY that the only way to

DEFEAT him is to trump up a DEUX EX-MACHINA that can make a god UN-GODLY?!! KRYPTONITE! Takes the “Super” OUT of the “MAN.””

(Seagle 37)

In accord with Seagle, I argue that the invention of kryptonite was ultimately intended to partially or fully disrupt Superman's power, a power that was no longer necessary in such quantities after the war years. In short, it was a narratological device that made it easier for readers to relate to the previously invulnerable superbeing. It is no coincidence that this period contains the most stories in which Superman loses its powers or has them significantly compromised in some way, leaving the character to overcome obstacles and adversity, but sometimes simply survive on its wits alone or on those of others. This can be noted in stories including “The Last Days of Superman” from *Superman* No. 156 (1962) in which Superman erroneously believes it has been infected by a rare Kryptonian virus and thinks it is dying. Supergirl (Kara Zor-El, cousin and fellow surviving Kryptonian) manages to gather all of Superman's allies to execute the requests set down in the character's last will and testament. This text shows that during this period, Superman's power and Otherness could be completely stripped of any sense of danger or foreignness, in this case chemically and xenobiologically rendered as weak as a mortal human. Simply put, what godlike being of power needs to write a will? Similarly, in “The Showdown Between Luthor and Superman” from *Superman* Vol. 1 No. 164 (1963) expands on the notion of a weak and mortal Superman by having Luthor

and Superman fight on a planet upon which Superman's powers do not exist due to its orbiting a red star. This text is part of a tradition in the Superman mythos that tries to humanize Lex Luthor and show that, without Superman, Lex may actually be a decent fellow. But more importantly, it is another example from the period of how the difficulty and disruptiveness of the character's diegetic power and Otherness could be solved by totally reducing it to human onto-existential standards.

According to Weldon, Kryptonite served another symbolic function that worked in tandem with a particular extradiegetic aspect of the character's creators, in that Superman's entire diegetic narrative can be viewed as an immigrant's tale. Weldon asserts that

"from a storytelling perspective, kryptonite or something like it would have come along sooner or later. Up to this point in his life, Superman lacked an Achilles' heel, and a hero who goes unchallenged is no hero at all. Sooner or later, the Man of Steel would have to encounter a threat more daunting than petty gangsters and their ineffectual handguns. Yet aside from its narrative inevitability, kryptonite's presence makes a kind of larger, symbolic sense. Siegel and Shuster had created the Man of Steel as the ultimate immigrant, the personification of the promise America represented to them. His abilities are metaphors for limitless potential and opportunity, for new horizons stretching out before us: the American way. It seems fitting, then, that the only thing capable of harming him would be

a reminder of the Old World he left behind, a past that is irrevocably gone. Only the past - our past-can hurt us. Years later, Superman's longing for his doomed homeworld would fuel some his most enduring stories. Yet no matter how tragic and emotional the tale, Superman's fondness for contemplating the past will always carry a bitterly ironic sting: all that remains of his long lost, beloved Krypton is a substance that is lethal to him. To this day, kryptonite functions in the Superman mythos as a physical manifestation of both survivor's guilt and a particularly toxic kind of nostalgia, a reminder that when we dwell on what we've lost, we can kill what we have." (Weldon. 59)

Despite its symbolic resonance, this strategy was not universally favoured, however. For example, in *The Krypton Companion* (2006), the noted comics illustrator Curt Swan, who worked on numerous stories and covers for Superman and other characters from the 1950s to the 1980s, states that he

"also used to argue about some of the things the writers came up with. I thought it was rather ridiculous that this character could do anything the writers could dream up, like fly in space or withstand an atomic blast. "If he's that invulnerable, then where's your story?" I used to ask...eventually, they had to invent things like all the different-coloured kryptonite, which seemed a feeble way of getting out the box they had put themselves in." (Swan 63)

DISRUPTIVITY AND THE ETHIC OF MATRIMONIAL STABILITY

In order to widen the variety of stories that artist-writer teams could tell, Weisinger invented the “Imaginary Story” line to explore non-canonical hypothetical scenarios that would otherwise be impossible under the rubric of the DC Multiverse's internal continuity and logic. The Imaginary Stories of this period also presented a conspicuous trend toward matrimonial stability. Despite the character's canonical disinterestedness in Lois Lane in the 1940s and 50s, many Imaginary Stories of the 1960s and 70s explored the outcomes of Superman settling down and starting a family (Figures xi. and xii. below). These narratives placed an ostensible premium on closure and happiness, symbolized by the binding union of marriage. This matrimonial inclination can be noted on the covers of many Superman stories during this period that consistently depicted the character as a type of ultimate suburban father-figure, “The Amazing Story of Superman-Red and Superman-Blue!” by Leo Dorfman in *Superman* No. 162 (July, 1963) being a particularly notable example. This particular story concludes with two identical iterations of Superman, Superman-Red and Super-Blue, solving all the worlds' socio-political problems, getting married and living happily ever after in a diegetic utopia. While the Imaginary Stories line was essentially a narratological and aesthetic space in which Superman's creative teams could explore the most radical diegetic possibilities of the character's power and Otherness with impunity, a series of Imaginary Stories that began in *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* Vol. 1, No. 19 (August,

1960) recursively imagined the prescriptive and heteronormative matrimonial life of 'Mr. and Mrs. Clark (Superman) Kent.' These stories featured the couple dealing with domestic super-parenting in an idealized suburban paradise. What is important to note in this domestic turn in is that,

“when Superman's writers gave themselves license to dream up anything they could, they invariably dreamed the American dream of the fifties, opting for the normative closure of marriage and family, of keeping house, cookouts, campouts, and, ultimately, a peaceful retirement. Most of Superman's Imaginary Stories, whose very reason for being was to explore how radically the setup could get upset, ultimately offered their readers assurance that Superman would remain comfortably, quietly, permanently quo.” (Weldon 127)

Diegetically, the character was portrayed in increasingly domestic situation-comedy scenarios which reflected the extradiegetic post-war status of American masculinity. While Superman comics covers depicted an actively martial Superman during the war years and slightly thereafter, post-war covers showed the opposite namely, Superman as a passive and awkward element in a domestic scene. This is exemplified by comparing the iconic cover of *Superman* No. 233 (January, 1971) (Figure ix. below), which symbolically depicts the character as truly invincible, able to overcome all impediments including green kryptonite, the only diegetically controllable substance able to mortally wound or kill it (albeit temporarily), with the cover of *Superman's Girl-Friend Lois Lane* No.

112 (Figure x. below) appearing the same year, which shows the character powerless to stop its bizarre arboreal transformation. This shift in characterization mirrored the troubled attempts of war veterans to reintegrate into peace-time society and readjust to the duties involved in maintaining a household and a family. This was also paired with a proliferation of stories in which Lois attempted to discover Superman's secret identity.



Fig. ix. taken from *Superman* Vol.1, No. 233 (January, 1971). Written by Dennis O'Neil, illustrated by Curt Swan. Cover.



Fig. x. taken from *Superman's Girl-Friend Lois Lane* Vol.1, No. 112 (August, 1971). Written by Carey Bates, illustrated by Werner Roth. Cover.



Fig. xi. taken from *Superman's Girl-Friend Lois Lane* Vol.1, No. 19 (August, 1960). Written by Robert Bernstein, illustrated by Kurt Scharffenberger. Cover.



Fig. xii. taken from *Superman* Vol.1, No. 166 (January, 1964). Written by Edmond Hamilton, illustrated by Curt Swan. Cover.

This sense of the character's onto-existential and thematic displacement led directly to widespread parody. For example, underground comics starring Gilbert Shelton's pornographic, super-powered Wonder Wart Hog, the World's Awfullest-Smelling Super-Hero, appeared in numerous humour magazines beginning in 1962. Similarly, NBC began airing an influential cartoon parody of Superman called *Underdog* on October 3, 1964. In March 1965, American Comics Group's Herbie morphed into the flying superhero the Fat Fury. The following month also saw Disney's Goofy become Super Goof. In October 1965,

NBC aired the premiere episode of *Atom Ant*. Atom Ant's catchphrase was "Up and at 'em, Atom Aaaaaant!", parodying Superman's which was "Up, up, and Away!" Even Archie Andrews of *Archie* comics fame participated in Superman parodies, gaining superpowers, a form-fitting costume, and fighting crime on the placid streets of Riverdale. As a superhero, Archie operated under the moniker Pureheart the Powerful. Archie's supporting cast, Reggie, Betty, and Jughead, all also adopted their own superheroic identities and soon afterwards were also indoctrinated into crime-fighting, parodying the then extensive Superman Family.

There were animated Superman parodies as well: from *Mighty Mouse* (1942-1961), the *Mighty Heroes* (1966), *Super Chicken* (1967), to *Super President* (1967). Included among these were also sitcom characters such as *Captain Nice* (1967) and *Mister Terrific* (1967). In 1996 *Monty Python* even parodied the super saturation of this period with their sketch titled "Bicycle Repairman," featuring a modest bicycle mechanic trying to make a living in a world inundated with superheroes. However, it was ABC's January 1966 *Batman* debut starring Adam West and Burt Ward as Batman and Robin respectively that made parody have a totally transformative effect on the concept of the comic book superbeing in consumers' eyes and imaginations. Following *Batman*, the once socio-politically and onto-existentially disruptive concept of the costumed hero/superbeing was totally conflated with all things camp in a way that made the idea of a character like Superman or Batman equatable with farce and the abjectly absurd (Weldon 135-9).

By the end of the 1970s, DC Comics' readers were vocal concerning their displeasure at the use of gimmickry and convenience in the character's narratives, particularly concerning the feeling that Superman was characterized as being physically too powerful (Jacob and Jones 212). Regardless of how the character's powers were diegetically disrupted during this period, DC's overall goal during the 1970s under Weisinger was to portray Superman as more personable, human and relatable in a way that eschewed the character's ontological struggle between its extra-terrestrial origins and terrestrial experience. As such, the character was intended to no longer be regarded as an insuperable symbol of power, but a character that readers could relate to and understand. This ethos can be summed up in Superman editor Carmine Infantino's statement: "[Readers] want someone they can relate to. Like kids today, Superman... suffer[s] from an inability to belong" (qtd. in Lang and Trimble 170).

The prevalence of matrimonial situations that ostensibly placed a premium on the sanctity and value of domestic life, also latently prefigured the character's difficulty reconciling its Otherness and its assimilated humanity explored in the decade to follow. The character's burgeoning emotional vulnerability during this period reflected the 1970s extradiegetic emphasis on self-exploration, self-discovery and spirituality. This ethos diverged from the 1960s approach to personal development being associated with politics, and therefore, the goals of personal achievement, fulfilment and authenticity became

detached from the socio-political arena in the 1970s. As Shulman suggests, personal reflection and emotional fulfilment were now private goals for the extradiegetic Everyman, which, again, the character would diegetically reflect in its increased obsession and inherent turmoil over the difficulty of being the survivor of a planetary cataclysm, and its desire for belonging in the wake of its radical onto-existential displacement (Shulman 79).

While Superman was still enjoying great success on radio, in comics, the character's fortunes had sharply depreciated. Sales of Superman comics were floundering in the shadow of Marvel comics' new-found dominance with psychologically complex and socially relevant characters like the neurotic Spider-Man, analogues for the extradiegetic socio-cultural problems of racial, ethnic, sexual, and religious persecution in the X-Men, and the depiction of the tumultuous inter-relationships of a literally nuclear family in the Fantastic Four. The end of the 1960s marked the conclusion of a period of rapid expansion of ideas, gimmicks, and new characters seen at the start of the decade, which faded into mechanical repetition by its conclusion. Superman's unimaginable powers no longer reflected the nation's darkening mood. As Knowles notes, "the social unrest of the Sixties terrified Middle America. As the civil rights movement went sour and industrial decay and urban blight created a new generation of increasingly vicious criminals, a new urban crime wave became" pre-eminent (Knowles 154).

While attempts to weaken and disrupt the character's power were mandated by DC's editorship during the 1970s so as to reflect the attempts of contemporary Americans to develop their self identities, by the end of the decade, Superman was still diegetically extremely powerful. Extradiegetically, Richard Nixon's involvement in the Watergate Scandal in the 1970s caused readers to question the diegetic portrayal of Superman's character, particularly in regard to its powers and its trustworthiness with them. While the American public's response to Watergate led to the institution of several laws to limit governmental power, including the War Powers Resolution and the 1978 Ethics in Government Act, this extradiegetic anxiety concerning the ethical, moral, and cultural problem of absolute power was also reflected diegetically in the character's mythos. In *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 233 written by Dennis O'Neil, illustrated by Curt Swan, for example, Morgan Edge, owner of The Daily Planet, states: "I don't trust anyone who can't be stopped! A wise man once said, 'Power corrupts—and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Who's to say that Superman will be an exception?" (O'Neil, 5). This inter-diegetic dialogue over the theme of power and trust concerned the notion that with too much power, there is "an almost irresistible temptation" to abuse it (Schulman 48). As such, extradiegetic and diegetic figures of authority and power, whether President or superhero, were no longer viewed simply as iconic or symbolic representations of their respective nations, but as flawed beings. The character's distant and lofty powers, which by this point were regarded largely as either tributary to the

State or outright laughable, seemingly had no place or purpose in the prelude to the intense civil unrest witnessed in the drug related violence of the 1980s crack epidemic to come.

SUFFERING, KILLING, AND DYING IN THE 1980s

1980s America did not completely abandon preceding cultural values but re-imagine them in praxis. The socio-cultural emphasis moved away from communitarian ideals and placed a higher significance on personal fulfilment and cultural alternatives and difference (Shulman 220). The American generation during the 1980s became more direct and active in influencing the individualistic ethos and tone of popular media. According to Geoffrey Holtz's *Welcome to the Jungle: The Why Behind Generation X* (1995), this generation expressed a notably variegated range of interests, lifestyles and career choices than previous generations, and were "also free of any defining event or experience. Whereas the Great Depression, each of the world wars, the Vietnam War, and Woodstock offered previous generations a definitive, powerful touchstone for group identity, [members of Gen X] have nothing like this" (Holtz 3). As such, the paradoxical zeitgeist of the 1980s, predicated on both disconnection and diversity, compounded the importance of individual identity.

Superman had spent the majority of the preceding decade on the margins of extradiegetic and diegetic culture. The 1970s were a time of disillusionment

for both the character and America. In order to keep apace with the decade's 'relevance' movement, the character needed to champion the most exigent extradiegetic socio-political issues of the day, including pollution, famine, gang warfare, and racism. While the Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal further added to the nation's feelings of disenchantment, the public came to view authority figures with increased resentment and cynicism in the 1980s. In many ways, Superman had become the very embodiment of what the public were now so suspicious and contemptuous of. As Weldon states, "with his close-cropped hair, clean-shaven face, and literally muscular defence of the status quo, Superman had now come to represent the capital- E Establishment...Superman...dutifully imposed order, and he looked like a cop" (Weldon 145-6).

Put simply, superhero comics that reflected nationalistic or authoritarian values were dying. Stock and adapted figures from pulps, horror, and science fiction traditions ranging from space heroes, anti-heroes, jungle heroes, barbarians, vigilantes, and avengers were tried to counteract this pervasive super-atrophy. As a result, the most narratologically and aesthetically innovative comics during the late 1970s and 1980s had little or nothing to do with superheroes. Notable examples include Barry Smith's *Conan* (1970), Mike Grell's *Warlord* (1975) which relied instead on high fantasy tropes, and Joe Kubert's aesthetically spectacular war and *Tarzan* comics. In response, DC Comics launched its Elseworlds imprint with the 1989 publication of *Batman*:

Gotham by Gaslight written by Brian Augustyn, illustrated by Mike Mignola, and edited by Mark Waid. This story portrays a Victorian version of Batman and follows his attempts to hunt down Jack the Ripper in a re-imagined Gothic Gotham City. In this way, the Elseworlds imprint was an evolution of Weisinger's Imaginary Story imprint, both in which existing characters could be taken out of canonical continuity and reintroduced in story-lines based on a completely new idea or concept that placed them in different diegetic timelines or realities.

The numerous Elseworlds stories featuring Superman presented the character in alternate diegetic realities, times, and worlds by re-imagining the most basic and familiar aspects of the character's aesthetic and narratological content. These narratives typically elicit a sense of novel excitement, yet mostly do not offer anything radically new and, instead, read as recapitulations of longstanding ideas. For example, John Byrne's *Action Comics* Annual Vol. 1, No. 6: "Legacy" (January, 1994) and *Superman: A Nation Divided* (1998) written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Eduardo Barreto shows Superman participate in the American Revolutionary and Civil Wars. In *Superman: Kal* (1995) written by Dave Gibbons, illustrated by José Luis García-López, Superman's spacecraft crash-lands in Medieval England, where the character grows to become a blacksmith, forging the future Excalibur and a special suit of armour from the wreckage of its ship. In *Superman's Metropolis* (1997) written by Jean-Marc Lofficier, illustrated by Ted McKeever, Superman fights against Futura, disguised as Lois Lane, in Fritz Lang's German Expressionist Metropolis.

Superman/Wonder Woman: Whom Gods Destroy (1997) written by Chris Claremont, illustrated by Dusty Abell sees Superman and Wonder Woman fight against Nazis and Greek gods in an alternate future. In *Superman: War of the Worlds* (1999) written by Roy Thomas, illustrated by Michael Lark, a 1940s inspired re-incarnation of the character encounters and defeats H.G. Wells' Martian invaders from *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

Diegetically, comic books during the 1980s reflected the extradiegetic themes of self-doubt, anti-authoritarianism, radical questioning, experimentation and revisionism. This change in the value, narratives, and aesthetic representation of comic book characters also effected comic book superheroes who became subject to ardent speculative, revisionist, and deconstructive approaches during this decade. Art Spiegelman's Holocaust survivor's narrative in *Maus* (1991) is one of the most highly regarded examples of the then new direction of the medium. In addition, concepts like revisionism, parody, self-reflexive humour, esoteric post-structuralist theories, and deconstructive techniques began to circulate and become part of the way in which the codes and conventions of preceding superhero comics were being opened up to new and radical possibilities. Other notable examples of this trend include *Mad's Superduperman* (1979), *Superduperman II* (1981), and *Stuporman ZZZ* (1983), Epic comics' *The Sensational She Hulk* (1989), and DC's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989) written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Dave McKean (McCue & Bloom 56).

Beginning in the late 1960s, a genealogy of this self-reflexive approach to comic book superheroes, including Superman, can be traced through the following texts: *Superman* No. 184 “The Demon Under the Red Sun!” (February, 1966) written by Otto Binder, illustrated by Curt Swan; Dennis O’Neil and Neil Adams’ “No Evil Shall Escape My Sight!” in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* Vol. 1, No. 76 (April 1970); *Superman* No. 249 “The Challenge of Terra-Man! /The Origin of Terra-Man” (March, 1972) written by Carey Bates, illustrated by Curt Swan; Bob Michelinie and John Romita Jr.’s “Demon in a Bottle” arc in *The Invincible Iron Man* Vol. 1, No. 120-128 (March-November 1979); *Superman* No. 417 “Warrior of Mars” (March, 1986) written by Elliot S! Maggin, illustrated by Curt Swan; *Secret Origins: The Golden-Age Superman* (April 1986), written by Roy Thomas, illustrated by Joe Shuster; Grant Morrison’s run on *Animal Man* including No. 5 “The Coyote Gospel” (December, 1988); No. 18 “At Play in the Fields of the Lord” (December, 1989), No. 19 “A New Science of Life” (January, 1990), No. 23 “Crisis” (May, 1990), No. 24 “Purification Day” (June, 1990), No. 25 “Monkey Puzzle” (July, 1990), and No. 26 “Deus Ex Machina” (August, 1990); Grant Morrison and Chris Westons’ *The Filth* (2004) which discussed a wide range of themes from Neoplatonic philosophy, to hierarchy, to Monadism, Morrison’s idiosyncratic take on the concept of the Demiurge, and concepts such as Status-Q and the Paperverse; and *Superman* No. 660 “The Art of the Prank” (March, 2007) written by Kurt Busiek, illustrated by Bret Blevins.

The above examples notwithstanding, a new generation of writers, and a

noticeable influx of non-American (especially British) artist-writer teams into American comics production, came to re-imagine and re-evaluate the significance, nature, humanity, and in some cases danger of the concept of the comic book superhero or costumed crime-fighter in a way that catered to a readership that, in the 1980s, was then now than in previous eras. Coupled with the emergence and increase of specialty comic stores that sold comics exclusively and at higher prices and standards of aesthetic and narrative quality, American comics readership changed from primarily young children, to teenagers and young adults with more disposal income. This proliferation of approaches and themes addressed in comic books can be summed up by one of the pioneer writers of this period, Alan Moore, who in 1986 stated that the comic book readership of the 1980s “demand new themes, new insights, new dramatic situations. We demand new heroes” (qtd. in Dubose 915).

As a result, comic book superbeings during this period were marked by revisionism, parody and satire. With this change in content, a higher emphasis was also placed on themes of violence and sexuality. As Mila Bongco notes in *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books* (2000), by the early 1980s, both Marvel and DC began to include the advisory warning “Suggested for Mature Readers” in their advertising for many of their comics, thereby offering readers comics which dealt “explicitly with violence and sexuality,” while also latently suggesting that the Comics Code as an insurmountable hurdle in the narrative and aesthetic development of the

medium had become “a spent force” (Bongco 100). While this proliferation of approaches, perspectives, voices, and talents informed the comics industry of this decade, the new, more “adult” comics often still featured superheroes, or focused on them as main protagonists. As Mike Dubose suggests in his essay “Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America” (2007), it can be argued that the concept of the comic book superhero still retained its diegetic value as a reflection of extradiegetic socio-political and cultural reality because at the beginning of the 1980s, “America had been victimized both at home and abroad,” including incidents and situations such as the kidnapping of American embassy employees in Iran, inflation and oil shortages, and an oncoming national recession (Dubose 915). Therefore, the concept of the comic book superhero that existed in the 1930s as a Saviour figure on a national scale was countermanded by the emergence of the flawed post-Nixon revision of the concept of the comic book superhero beginning in the 1970s.

Superbeing and masked crime-fighter comics have always been associated with socio-political and cultural values. As such, values of the status quo have been resolutely reflected and reinforced by the exploits of comic book superbeing, heroes and villains alike, from their inception until the 1980s. Texts including *Miracleman* (1982), *Watchmen* (1986), and *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) since made efforts to re-evaluate those values, and re-contextualize them within the dynamically changing sociopolitical frames of reference of

modern readers, as well as the changing value of the idea of the comic book superbeing itself. This can be noted in the rise of the anti-hero and the death-dealer, evidenced by the increased popularity of characters ranging from Spawn, Lobo, The Maxx, The Punisher, to Wolverine during this period. As a result, the then essentialized link between Superman's power, positive morality, and a pro-social agenda made the character's power and Otherness completely alien to both the extradiegetic and diegetic zeitgeist of the period. While Superman's bright and hopeful image was primarily associated with the idea of a better Tomorrow, texts like Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*, Moore's *Miracleman* and *Watchmen*, and Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill's *Marshal Law* (1987) cynically professed that in so far as superbeings were involved, such a Tomorrow would invariably come at a high price in terms of the violent destruction of property, ecology, and human life.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* is often regarded as the prime example of the deconstruction of the concept of the comic book superbeing, and costumed crime-fighter of all types. Similarly, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* deconstructed the idea of victimhood and the notion of reforming villains by reversing the concept of villain-as-oppressor, instead portraying iconic villains including the Joker and Two Face as victims of a fascist oppressor, either the State or its repressive tributaries in the form of ideologically motivated superheroes and costumed crime-fighters. In Miller's story, Superman is the foremost example of this type of ideologically motivated oppression in that

the character is portrayed as little more than a lickspittle of the American government, making the character an insuperable vanguard of a totalitarian regime of American Imperialism.

As Moore stated in a 2008 interview titled "The Craft: An Interview with Alan Moore" for *Engine Comics*, initially, the premise for *Watchmen* was to examine what superheroes would be like "in a credible, real world" (Moore 2008). However, as the narrative developed, Moore said the text became about "power and about the idea of the superman manifest within society" (Moore 2008). Furthermore, in "Toasting Absent Heroes: Alan Moore discusses the Charlton-Watchmen Connection" (2000), Moore states that the process of writing *Watchmen* also involved an abandonment of superhero nostalgia for a more prevalent focus on the psycho-emotional reactions of non-superpowered individuals existing in a diegetic world dominated or influenced by superbeings (Moore 2000). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Wright describes the text as "Moore's obituary for the concept of heroes in general and superheroes in particular" (Wright 32). By situating the narrative within a contemporary sociological context that reflects extradiegetic socio-economics, culture, politics and history, Wright suggests that the characters of *Watchmen* were Moore's "admonition to those who trusted in 'heroes' and leaders to guard the world's fate" (Wright 272). The underlying ethos of the text can therefore be described as deconstructive, whereby the idea of the sovereignty and value of comic book superheroes was challenged in *Watchmen* by critiquing the long-held

mainstream faith in such icons as the abnegation of personal responsibility to "the Reagans, Thatchers, and other 'Watchmen' of the world who [were] supposed to 'rescue' us and perhaps lay waste to the planet in the process" (Wright 272-3).

Further grounds for a deconstructive attestation for Moore's approach and results in *Watchmen* can be found in "Deconstructing the Hero" (2005). Author Iain Thomson states that the heroes in *Watchmen* almost all share a nihilistic outlook, which Moore presents "as the simple, unvarnished truth" as a way to "deconstruct the would-be hero's ultimate motivation, namely, to provide a secular salvation and so attain a mortal immortality" (Thomson 108). Thomson adds that Moore's approach in the text "develops its heroes precisely in order to ask us if we would not in fact be better off without heroes" (Thomson 56). Through this deconstruction of the concept of the comic book superhero, *Watchmen* ultimately "suggests that perhaps the time for heroes has passed" (Thomson 109-111). Commenting on the combination of the revisionist and deconstructive approach in *Watchmen*, Geoff Klock also states in *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002), that

"Alan Moore's realism ... performs a kenosis towards comic book history ... [which] does not ennoble and empower his characters ... Rather, it sends a wave of disruption back through superhero history ... devalue[ing] one of the basic superhero conventions by placing his masked crime fighters in a realistic world." (Klock 63)

As such, through *Watchmen*, "Moore's exploration of the [often sexual] motives for costumed crime-fighting sheds a disturbing light on past superhero stories, and forces the reader to reevaluate—to revision—every superhero in terms of Moore's kenosis—his emptying out of the tradition." (Klock 65)

In both *Watchmen* and *Miraclemans'* respective diegeses, Moore portrays a deeply dystopian view of the foundations of "world peace" influenced or established by archetypal character representatives of the comic book superbeing/costumed crime-fighter. Through the godlike yet emotionally distant powers of Dr. Manhattan that allows the character to willfully and totally manipulate space-time, the megalomaniacal genius of Ozymandias whose Machiavellian machinations allow the character to manipulate both the hero community (the Minutemen), global governments, and publics into accepting a manufactured utopia based on intricate falsehoods and the massive loss of life and American infrastructure, and the psychological instability of Rorschach whose obsessive pursuit of justice ironically threatens to undo the ethically precarious world peace established by Ozymandias, the former reads as a cynical account of the idea of world peace, let alone its possibility. In contrast, the combination of the Romantic and decisive application of power by Miracleman and Miraclewoman makes the latter read as a Pyrrhic-yet-hopeful, future oriented account of the diegetic utopian potential of comic book superbeings. Both texts hold that the use of superpower to radically reform society requires an apocalyptic event, fabricated or otherwise: be it in the form of

a giant thermonuclear squid detonating in Times Square as it is in *Watchmen*, or the genocidal sociopathic rampage of an unstable superbeing as it is in *Miracleman*. As such, both Moore's seminal superbeing narratives conclude that the revaluation of all values and being on a diegetic earth reflecting extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality by superpowered agents cannot be achieved naively or easily. For many, Moore's conceptualization and execution of these ideas in both texts is distasteful or dangerous because it echoes the rhetoric, horrors and humanistic failures of genocide, eugenics, extremism, ethnic and religious cleansing inherent in any fascist regime. While Fingerioth conservatively suggests that "when superheroes try to change society proactively, things almost always end up worse than they were at the beginning," I contend that *Watchmen* and *Miracleman* raise the important issue of the philosophical, socio-political and scientific consequences of the complex, and often turbulent, interaction between superpowered beings using their radical power and Otherness to pursue morally or State-determined ends in their respective diegetic worlds (Fingerioth 161).

PATHOS AND THE SUFFERING OF SUPERMAN

In an attempt to counterbalance this cynicism and stagnation surrounding the character, DC's editorial board, under Julius Schwartz from 1971 to 1986, decided to 'humanize' Superman by letting readers see it suffer and contemplate that suffering. This was an editorial continuation of Weisinger's editorship, who was quoted as saying that to make Superman a more

“likable character, the type of story I became fondest of was the one where Superman lost his powers and had to survive on his natural wits. I'd do that repeatedly. You could identify with him then, an outstanding character deserving of your admiration, a real hero because of the clever things that he did when deprived of his super-powers...His struggled to enlarge Kandor and to bring Luthor to justice allowed Mort and Edmond to send Superman to other worlds on epic quests. They showed us a Man of Steel who could become driven, fatigued, not always logical, and therefore more human. At times there was almost a bone-weariness in Superman that did not exist under the other writers' direction.

Paradoxically, by making such a powerful hero more like us, the two men raised the level of myth.” (Zeno, qtd. In Eury 26)

One of the ways this was achieved was to drastically alter the character's power levels. John Byrne's reboot *The Man of Steel* (July, 1986) sought to interpolate Superman into subjective human experiences of pain and distress by radically

reducing its levels of power that were the norm during its late 1960s/early 1970s narratives. Beginning by revising the character's canonical origins, Byrne's infant Kal-El was indistinguishable from any other extradiegetic human child, and was subject to all the same vulnerabilities. It had no innate superpowers and these developed along a 'pubescent arc' as it grew under the influence of his text's earth's yellow sun. In this way, the disruptivity of the character's power and Otherness was smoothed into a gradual process of appropriation. Due to the fact that there was a period of essential similarity with human being before its essential dissimilarity to human being developed, Byrne's Superman went through the same trials of being that allowed it to accurately simulate what it is like to feel pain or vulnerability, as humans do.

In addition, the 1980s evidenced perhaps the most concentrated image-text expression of a pathetic Superman, exemplified by iconic depictions of the character as distraught, confused, enraged, or weeping (see Figures xiii-xvi. below). Primarily, this took the form of psychological distress whereby the reader witnesses Superman being overwhelmed by the inextricable link between its radical existential isolation and the disruptivity of its power and Otherness. Besides those aesthetic examples highlighted below, diegetically, there are also notable narratological examples of Superman's psycho-emotional suffering. For example, the character endured and overcome the personal tragedy of losing not only Kara Zor-El during *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (April, 1985-March, 1986), but also the death of Jonathan Kent in "The Last Days of Ma and Pa

Kent” in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 161 (1993), and “The End” in *Superman* Vol. 2, No. 77 (1993). In each case, the character was made to face and subsequently overcome tragic personal experiences that questioned the dialectical simplicity of its adopted world view.



Fig. xiii. taken from *Superman: Exile* (January, 1998). Written by George Pérez, Dan Jurgens et al., illustrated by Jerry Ordway et al. p.g. 114.



Fig. xiv. taken from *Superman Vol.1*, No. 146 (July, 1961). Written by Otto Binder, illustrated by Al Plastino.

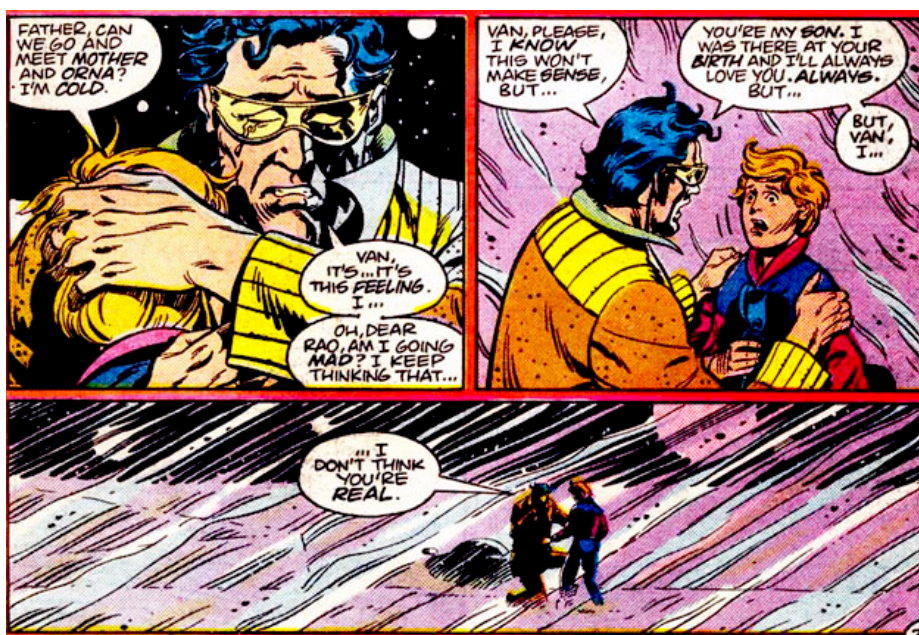


Fig. xv. taken from *Superman Annual Vol.1*, No. 11 (1985). Written by Alan Moore, illustrated by Dave Gibbons. p.g. 22.



Fig. xvi. taken from *Superman: Whatever Happened To The Man Of Tomorrow?* (July, 2010). Written by Alan Moore, illustrated by Curt Swan. p.g. 24.

The underlying problem with Superman's pathetic displays was whether or not it is satisfying or narratologically resonant for the character to remain an inflexible archon of a naïve 'good' morality after such transformative experiences of tragedy and depression during a period where the superheroic rivals of DC's flagship character were tending toward narratological and aesthetic realism. I contend that this particular problem is systemic of the more fundamental

existential problem inherent in the character's monachopsis namely, the tension between being a stolid global champion and a profoundly isolated, orphaned and lost individual within the context of its diegetic mythos. This seemingly insurmountable impasse is exacerbated to the point of crisis in this period because despite attempts to engender pathos in readers by making Superman weaker and therefore able to feel a greater degree of pain, in Byrne's *Man of Steel* Vol. 1, No. 4 (November, 1986) for example, the character is shown to still able to lift a luxury cruise-liner out of the ocean without difficulty, still itself, unchanged by tragedy at all (Byrne 13-15). As such, a problematic paradox emerges. While Byrne and others sought to consciously develop "Clark Kent", "Kal-El", and "Superman" into psychologically complex and rounded characters in view of the reflexivity of the tension between their existential crisis and their power and Otherness, the most innovative revisions of the character during this period served to compound the conundrum of its disruptivity, not resolve it. Noted Superman writer Elliot S! Maggin disagreed with Schwartz and Byrne's strategy of depowering the character, stating that depowering the character, so that it could no longer juggle planets yet, paradoxically still be able to juggle buildings, had no point in terms of resolving the moral and ethical tension inherent in a powerful character using said power for allegedly moral ends. For Maggin,

"Superman stories are not about power. They're about moral and ethical choices. Each one asks the question: What does a good person do in any

given situation if he's got all the power in the world? Writers and artists and editors – and producers and directors and actors, for that matter – don't get to limit Superman's powers. Once you do that it's not the character you think you're dealing with any more. Every “superman” in every culture – Zeus and Odin, John Henry and Paul Bunyan; Beowulf and Arthur – gets to decide the answer, in his own context, to that question. The success or failure of a storyteller's attempt to convey that is based on the degree to which the character gets to illustrate that for himself. If you start by “de-powering” such a character, then your mythology is flawed. You don't know which archetype it is you're really dealing with.” (Maggin qtd. in Eury, 142)

In contrast to Byrne's primarily power-oriented revision of the character, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons elected a decidedly psychological approach to the problem of Superman's suffering. In September 1985, *Superman Annual* No. 11 featured a story titled “For The Man Who Has Everything.” In this story, Wonder Woman, Batman, and Robin travel to Superman's Fortress of Solitude to celebrate its birthday. Upon arrival, they discover their colleague in a catatonic state, with an enormous alien plant life form attached to its chest. The plant, called a Black Mercy, attaches itself to its host/victim in a form of symbiosis. It feeds off of the victim/host's 'bio-aura' while simultaneously accessing the host/victim's mind, allowing it to feed her/him/it a psycho-emotional simulation of the 'happy ending' they most desire in order to keep

her/him/it docile. Initially, the 'happy ending' Superman envisions is a simulation of what its life might have been like had Krypton never exploded. The fantasy consists of the character being happily married to the former Kryptonian actress Lyla Lerrol, a successful archaeologist, and a father of two. While Superman is under the control of the Black Mercy's simulation, Wonder Woman fights the evil space tyrant Mongul responsible for Superman's enchantment, while Batman and Robin simultaneously attempt to free Superman from the plant's thrall. The happy ending Superman envisions is perfect, however. As the character's will struggles against the plant's control, the simulation becomes increasingly horrific. It is revealed that Superman's elderly father Jor-El was dismissed from Krypton's Science Council after its theory of the planet's destruction was disproved, leaving Jor-El an embittered member of a violent and extremist reactionary religious faction called The Sword of Rao, whose ideology is based on a crusade against modern technocentric Kryptonian society. Eventually, Superman fights off the Black Mercy. Enraged, confused, and heart-sick, Moore and Gibbons show the reader a rarely seen wrathful and murderous iteration of the character. After an intense fight ensues, Robin saves the day by throwing the Black Mercy at Mongul and leaving him to suffer it.

This story is important for two main reasons in terms of making the character suffer. First, Moore depicts Superman as a character whose deepest desire is to undo the same disaster that brought it into being and made it special *in principium*. Moore insists that what Superman wants most is a 'normal life' by

quintessential postmodern Western standards namely, a stable family, a respectable profession, and healthy children. The essence of this desire is to be rid of its power, the uncanniness of its body, and its Otherness: to relinquish the gift/burden of carrying immense power in favour of a quotidian and comparatively powerless existence in which it is absolutely undifferentiated from humanity. Fundamentally, what Moore's Superman wants most is either to not be at all, or not be what it is. Second, when the Black Mercy's thrall is disrupted, Moore shows the reader something that had not been seen since the character's 1940s adventures namely, a Superman who is extremely violent and dangerous. More importantly, Moore's story suggests that Superman's most poignant form of suffering is not located in the physicality of its power or, with the aid of devices like red suns and kryptonite, its powerlessness. Instead, Moore suggests that it is the psychological trauma of presenting Superman with the opportunity, real or virtual, to choose to be other to its Otherness, to be 'normal', and imbuing that fantasy with a fundamental inaccessibility is the source of the character's most resonant suffering (Weldon 215-6).

The implication of Moore's characterization of Superman's deepest wish is that it does not matter what Superman truly and deeply desires because real or no, it can never truly attain it. At one point in the narrative, Mongul says to Superman, "I fashioned a PRISON that you could not leave without giving up your HEART'S DESIRE. Escaping it must have been like tearing off your own ARM" (Moore 29). However, the underlying truth is that Superman's heart's

desire was flawed to begin with, unacceptable in a way that preceded any succour it could provide. Furthermore, the story suggests that this trauma has to do with the tensions and severances of the paternal bond between fathers and sons. In the story, Jor-El and Superman are estranged. Furthermore, the character is ultimately and tragically aware that the simulation of its own son, named Van in the story, is not real (see Figure xv. above). In this way, Moore characterizes the implacability of Superman's trauma as having distinctly Freudian undertones.

Another important facet of the character's suffering also emerged when Superman participated in a prominent trend in superhero fiction during the 1980s by killing. In *Superman* Vol. 2, No. 22 (October, 1988), John Byrne wrote and illustrated a version of Supergirl that reintroduced the character back into to the DC Multiverse in a story titled "The Price". While this story takes place in an alternate "pocket universe" featuring a "pocket earth," the most resonant aspect of this story pertains to Superman executing the genocidal Phantom Zone criminals General Zod, Quex-UI, and Zaora. Initially, Superman uses the gold kryptonite to in the pocket universe to permanently de-power them. However, it goes well beyond this act of sterilization by exposing the three Kryptonian criminals to lethal levels of green kryptonite, effectively executing them without anything resembling a fair trial that the self-assuredly ethical principles of 'truth' and 'justice' would demand of their most ardent champion.

This story is important because it raises the question of whether it is

enough for Superman to shed a single, solemn tear and declare that executing these beings is “the hardest thing [it had] ever had to do” in the face of the protracted and painful deaths of its fellow, albeit murderous, Kryptonians (Byrne 16). The story directly implicates the reader for her/his complicity in the character’s historically consistent decision to take it upon itself to act as judge, jury, and executioner of its diegetic earths. More broadly, the narrative also directly examines the psycho-emotional effects on a being which has interpolated human concepts like guilt when it conscientiously uses its powers and abilities for murder. One answer provided by the narrative is extreme ‘psychological’ instability, and subsequently, self-imposed exile. Under editor Mike Carlin, Superman’s creative team decided that the character’s violation of its sacred commandment not to kill would result in penance in the form of Superman extruding itself from human society, taking an extended period of exile in space to reflect and reassess itself in the thirteen-part “Superman in Exile” storylines that ran through the February to August 1989 Superman titles. In these narratives, Superman leaves Earth and journeys through deep space on a voyage of self-(re)discovery, and is haunted throughout its travels, encountering the Kryptonians it executed in a series of bizarre and prosecutorial hallucinations (see Figure xiii. above).

THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN IN THE 1990s

The 1990s continued to emphasize the individualistic ethos of the preceding decade. The concepts of individualism and capitalism became increasingly inextricable, notable in the decade's emphasis on niche marketing, personal customizations and personal choice. This trend can be noted in certain aspects of the comics industry during this decade as well, with a heightened importance placed on distinction, difference and individuality in products being sold. As a way of maintaining appeal in these socio-economic market conditions, comics throughout the industry, and most noticeably in superhero comics, tried to set themselves apart from their competition and ensure commercial success in terms of relevance and attractiveness. This included aesthetic methods, such as foil and/or holographic covers, or radical changes to character's costumes.

Narratively, this trend saw the emergence of the superfluous death and resurrection of many superhero comic book characters as common industrial praxis during the 1980s. Due to the fact that comic revenues were high during this period, many comics publishers felt vindicated that “[a]fter decades in America’s cultural gutter, comic books had finally emerged as a respectable and fantastically profitable entertainment industry worthy of a listing on the New York Stock Exchange” (Wright 280). While Superman was, diegetically, characterized as being more human than it had ever been, many readers still felt that the character was overly conservative and thematically irrelevant. Extradiegetically,

American voters were attracted to Bill Clinton as a candidate in part due to his “personal failings” (Wright 282). As such, the 1990s emphasis on personal or subjective struggles with various forms of individual darkness as more interesting or appealing than a broad, morally mediated external struggle between antiquated conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ Wright states that “the ‘Death of Superman’ was... a powerful metaphor for American culture... in the post-Cold War era” (Wright 282).

The 1980s experiments with subjecting Superman to various types of deconstructive psycho-physical pain had not achieved the pathos or cohesion DC editors, under Mike Carlin, had envisioned. Instead of making Superman the perpetrator or recipient of various kinds of psycho-emotional suffering, DC decided to kill Superman outright. This was not to be the first time the character had died, though it would be the first time it died canonically. As above-mentioned, a notable tradition of the history comic book superbeings, especially flagship properties like Superman, is that they do not typically stay dead, Marvel's *Fallen Son: The Death of Captain America* (June, 2007) and *Captain America: Reborn* (January, 2009) by Ed Brubaker, for example. However, DC Comics, used the event as a way of introducing dynamic tensions and exploring how the worlds of the DC multiverse would react to the character's death.

Extradiegetically, the announcement of the death of Superman triggered a wave of public nostalgia and patriotism in America. The character's diegetic fate became a national sensation, featured in articles from *People* magazine to

New York Newsday, Newsweek, and the New York Times. Despite this outpouring of gravitas, comic book industry insiders knew that the likelihood of DC permanently killing off its most heavily licensed character was absurd. The trade press recognized the death of Superman for what it was namely, a publicity stunt. This did not stop comics retailers from placing an unprecedented five million copy advance order on the issue in the wake of the wide-spread mainstream mass media coverage of the event. On September 2 1992, CNN reported on comic book fans' reaction to the looming death of the Man of Steel. One boy in a comic book store said that he was happy about the death because, "I'm an anti-Superman fan. I don't like him. He's like a boy-scout compared to other superheroes." In general, CNN journalist Jennifer Moss reported, Superman seemed too moral and "too gentle for today's teenagers" (Moss 1992).

"The "Death of Superman" arc ran from December 1992 to January 1993. While the diegetic death of Superman should, in theory, have added an irreplaceable depth to the mythos of the character, the reality of the death of Superman was largely an aesthetic matter with little narratological nuance. Artist-writer Jan Jurgens' minimal plot was practically sustained by the brutal and epic action depicted in Superman's climactic battle with Doomsday. This action is sustained by the thin premise of a mindless giant alien emerging from a subterranean vessel. It escapes and wreaks wanton destruction. The Justice League attempt to intercept it. It bests them all easily, earning the codename

'Doomsday' as a result. It then heads directly for Metropolis. Superman attempts to waylay it numerous times, but soon realizes that Doomsday has been engineered to the personification of a rage incapable of surrender. Ultimately, in *Superman* No. 75, Superman's fate is ultimately decided in a brawl where it confronts Doomsday in front of the Daily Planet office building. Superman and Doomsday simultaneously deliver final blows to each other. Doomsday dies, and Lois rushes to the side of Superman's broken and 'lifeless' body.

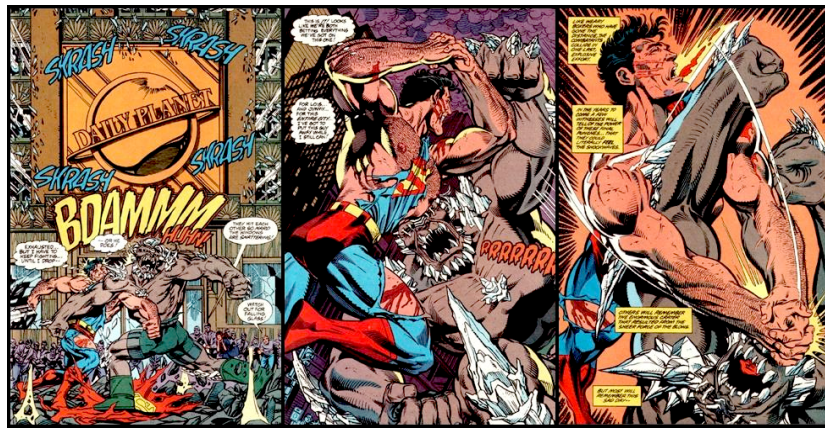


Fig. xvii. Taken from *Superman* Vol. 2, No. 75 (January, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.



Fig. xviii. Taken from *Superman* Vol. 2, No. 75 (January, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.



Fig. xix. Descent from the Cross by Jusepe de Ribera (1637).



Fig. xx. Descente de la Croix by Nicolas Poussin (1630).

Jurgens' composition in Figure xviii. employs figurative aspects that evoke comparisons with the scene of Christ's decent from the cross as described in John 19: 38-42 and Mark 15: 40-47. Jurgens' dramatization of the character's death, such as the placement of the tattered cape, the mourning and distraught Lois with the lifeless Superman on her lap, and the figure of Jimmy Olsen bearing witness – literally taking photographs – in the background, resembles Classicist and Tenebrist depictions of the comparable scene of Christ's death in Christian dogma (see Figures xix. and xx. above). Not only does Jurgens' aesthetic revisit the Superman-as-Christ subtext of the character, but draws overt thematic equivalences between Superman's self-sacrifice and themes of martyrdom and redemption underscored in the Passion. Furthermore, not only does the text evoke Judeo-Christian iconography and themes, its final panels act as symbolic images of two superpowers who cannot defeat one another without defeating themselves that arguably were not lost on much of the comic's post-Cold War audience.

The problem with *Superman* No. 75 is not the fact of Superman's death itself. As aforementioned, this had already been done. The point, however, is that it had been done with greater pathetic gravitas in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 149 "The Death of Superman!" (November, 1961) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Curt Swan, for example. The primary point of contrast between Siegel and Jurgens' approach to the character's death is that the latter did not elicit a comparable reaction, nor spark similar controversies in DC 's readership. While

Jurgens' art is certainly impressive, the text reads like the spectacle of a modern summer blockbuster on a small scale (see Figure xvii. above). This can be noted in the formal aspects of the issues leading up the climactic events of *Superman* No. 75. Each page of *Adventures of Superman* No. 497 (December, 1992) employed only four-panels and, similarly, *Action Comics* No. 684 used three, while *Superman: The Man of Steel* No. 19 (December, 1992; January, 1993) used two. The effect created a formal aesthetic count-down, culminating in the twenty-two panel set-piece that used the entire aesthetic and narratological space of the issue to deliver the climactic battle between Superman and Doomsday as a series of splash pages. Jurgens' attempt to offset Superman's alienating effect, its disruptive Otherness, by killing it was certainly more visceral than Siegel and Shusters' effort, but it was also complicit in the socio-cultural and economic spectacle thereof. As a result of these narratological and aesthetic choices, the *Death of Superman* suffered a tepid reception. Instead of holding to the mandate of lowering Superman's powers to heighten the threat it faced, and add pathos to its struggle against near insuperable forces, "the villains powers have been amplified. You now have more cosmic, larger-than-life threats. Darkseid was probably the first at DC, but a number of other characters, including Mongul, Doomsday, and Imperiex – omnipotent, butt-kicking killers and dominators – often come in and make it a job for Superman" (O'Neil ptd. in Eury 119). "What dismayed [...] readers," Weldon further notes, "was not the story's content but its execution, which struck them as... unearned, and – most

importantly – unworthy of the character” (Weldon 248). In a 1993 interview for Wizard magazine, Jurgens gave the following rationale behind his aesthetic and narratological decisions in *Superman* No. 75 in support of the text, stating that he

“kept calling [Doomsday] a force of nature...I was absolutely convinced that we had to do a villain who was going to give Superman a run for his money. We had done so many business-suit villains, so many lame old boring guys. We had to have something that could pound the crap out of Superman... [Doomsday] is primal rage incarnate.” (Jurgens qtd. in Weldon 284)

However, had Jurgens sought to pit Superman against a more well-established character on a solely might-against-might basis, there were, at the time, at least three obvious choices that would have generated a greater sense of tragedy regarding Superman's liquidation namely, Darkseid, Mongul, or Superman's inverted self, Bizarro.

The seeming insignificance of Superman's death in *Superman* No. 75 is important in illustrating the character's uncertain thematic standing at the time of its temporary demise during the early 1990s. The narrative is neither original nor dynamic. In essence, Superman forfeits its life as a result of repeated bludgeoning, as if to in some way balance or offset the moral and ethical cost of the murders it committed in *Superman* No. 22 by being made to die as well. The reason for this bludgeoning is equally exiguous for two main reasons. First, the

antagonist that dispatches the character has the air of randomness and crudeness that a hastily assembled pabulum possesses. As a villain, Doomsday is completely unoriginal. It is, if in name alone, interchangeable with any of the ultra-violent and self-assuredly 'dark' characters so popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s like Rob Leiffield's Badrock or Smash, for example. Second, the threat Doomsday presents to Metropolis is ultimately lukewarm, coming off as little more than an unnecessary means to an equally unnecessary end, further compounding the lack of exigency of the character sacrificing of its power, body, and Otherness. In the last instance, Doomsday was essentially a placeholder for "primal rage" which left what should have been an event to reverberate throughout global popular culture for decades coming off as sourceless, abstract, and narratologically meaningless (Weldon 248).

While Superman evolved from a violent and dangerous figure of retributive justice in the 1940s, to a paternalistic yet auxiliary mascot for 'Truth, Justice, and the American way' most ostensibly during and slightly after World War II, to a beneficent yet tortured messianic figure by the early 1990s, Superman has always served, defended, and reproduced the Judeo-Christian values upheld by the American majority throughout its publication history. It would appear that Superman's genealogical movement, from the late 1940s to the early 1990s, reflects a systematic depreciation of the ontological and existential value of the disruptivity of its power and Otherness. As its history shows, the character has been portrayed and characterized as a violent New

Deal reformer steeped in a naive moral authority that dignified its punishment of those seeking dishonest profits with a paradoxical conscientiousness summarized in its credo of 'truth' and 'justice' which oftentimes manifested as unethical violence. It has also been a nationalist icon and, lastly, a parodic and publicity device. As such, CHAPTERS I and II endeavoured to examine how the idea of Superman has developed – where it came from and where it has been – in the years before and after its creation.

CHAPTER III: SUPERMAN AS ALIEN: ONTO-EXISTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF XENOLOGICAL SPECULATION

In order to parse the concepts of Superman's disruptivity in terms of power and Otherness xenologically, which I argue also necessarily involves identity, I will open this chapter by providing an overview of xenological speculation. The term 'xenology' has been used variably to describe and discuss the tension between concepts including difference, Otherness, and the interaction between the known and the unknown, be it abstract or uncannily familiar. In *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1968), Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott state that the terms "xenology" derives from the Greek word *xenos*, meaning 'foreign', 'alien', 'strange', and/or 'unusual' in its noun form. As an adjective, the term means 'stranger', 'wanderer', and/or 'refugee'. Alternatively, in *India and Europe: Perspectives on Their Spiritual Encounter* (1981), Wilhelm Halbfass uses the term to describe the cultural study of ethnocentric views held by different societies regarding different classes or types of foreigner. Within Halbfass's Indological study, xenology refers to the ways that a given culture perceives, defines, and understands individuals or cultures alien or Other to it. As such, Halbfass's xenology is the study of the various ways 'self' and 'Other' are defined within a historical context of colliding cultures. According to Brian

Stableford's *Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopaedia* (2006), xenology can also be defined as “an associate concept of exobiology, referring to a hypothetical science of extra-terrestrial, especially alien, society” with “analogical and extrapolative relationship to ethnology which is similar to that between exobiology and biology” (Stableford 571). Similarly, Robert A. Freitas Jr.'s *Xenology: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Extraterrestrial Life, Intelligence, and Civilization* (1979) provides an exhaustive outline of the principles of xenology, including the following interests and sub-disciplines:

“the history of the idea of extra-terrestrial life; comparative planetology, stars, and galaxies; xenobiology (definition/origin of life, exotic biochemistries, and possible alien bioenergetics, biomechanics, sensations, reproduction, and intelligence); extra-terrestrial civilizations (energy sources, biotechnology, interstellar travel, alien weapons, planetary and stellar engineering, xenosociology, and extra-terrestrial governments and culture); interstellar communication techniques; and the sociology, legal issues, and appropriate interaction protocols pertaining to First Contact.” (Freitas Jr. 2008)

There are numerous other speculative models that address the religious, scientific, cultural, legal, and ecological outcomes of making contact with extra-terrestrials that are not, strictly speaking, defined as xenology, but are xenological in praxis. For example, Albert A. Harrison's “Fear, pandemonium, equanimity and delight: human responses to extra-terrestrial life” (2011)

examines a wide range of possible contact scenarios, including the interaction between extra-terrestrial and terrestrial civilizations based on mutual advancement, to the total subjugation of humanity. Other scholars engaging in xenological speculation suggest that such polarized scenarios depend on the level of aggression displayed toward humanity by alien species/civilizations, such as James W. Deardorff's "Possible Extraterrestrial Strategy for Earth" (1986), the nature of extra-terrestrial ethics, such as Seth D. Baum's "Universalist ethics in extra-terrestrial encounter" (2010), and the biological compatibility between extra-terrestrials and human beings, such as Steven Dick's "Extraterrestrials and Objective Knowledge" (2000), in which he argues that the biological constituents for the encountering species' faculties of data processing, data delivery, and comprehension would determine the nature and rate of said encounter.

Some of the scenarios developed by cognitive psychologists, sociologists, physicists, astronomers, and futurists predict, broadly speaking, positive and collaborative outcomes for humanity following such contacts. Harrison and Dick go as far as to suggest that such encounters might result in an advanced extra-terrestrial civilization imparting equally advanced knowledge to humankind in areas currently inaccessible to our species. In their paper "Contact: Long-Term Implication for Humanity" (2000), they speculate that such areas could include T.O.E (the theory of everything), faster-than-light travel, and the successful and safe manipulation of dark matter. Similarly, Allen Tough's 1986 essay "What

Role will Extraterrestrials Play in Humanity's Future?" posits that extra-terrestrials interceding in human affairs might do so to prevent humanity from being destroyed by catastrophe and extinction-level events such as nuclear war or asteroid impacts; offering advice to humanity and its leaders as to how to avoid conflict and potential destruction, albeit dependent on the widespread consent of humanity; or forcibly aiding humanity to avoid destruction against its will. However, in Tough's text *When SETI Succeeds: The Impact of High-Information Contact* (2000), such an encounter with a highly morally, ethically and technologically advanced extra-terrestrial species, regardless of how collaborative or co-operative, is speculated to potentially lead to an atrophy of humanity's sense of achievement within the context of its own history.

Conversely, other scholars and scientists have posited scenarios in which the nature of the encounter is hostile. In Michiu Kaku's 2009 *Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation, and Time Travel* as well as in Geoff Boucher's 2012 article for *Los Angeles Times Hero Complex* titled "Alien Encounters': A Few Sage (and Sagan) Thoughts on Invasion," both texts posit that any extra-terrestrial species able to safely locate and navigate to Earth would be able to easily destroy human civilization. Other contact scenario models and speculative frameworks focus on a specific area of human civilization that would be effected by an encounter with an extra-terrestrial species/civilization. These include theology, such as Ted Peters' essay "The implications of the discovery of extra-terrestrial

life for religion” (2011); and the possibility of re-emerging or altogether new political power struggles within national and international governing bodies as speculated by Michael A. G. Michaud in *Contact with Alien Civilizations: Our Hopes and Fears about Encountering Extraterrestrials* (2007).

Due to its latently speculative nature, xenology is as much indebted to science fiction as it is to hard sciences like cosmology, astronomy and biology. Science fiction is particularly apt in re-assessing the xenology of Superman, for example, because it is or can be a nuanced, sophisticated and speculatively far-reaching field dealing with complex concepts including interstellar travel, extrasolar alien life, scientifically reasoned planetary environs conducive to facilitating evolution of such life, and various aspects of possible alien physiology, sociology and philosophy. In this way, many examples of science fiction can be described as fundamentally xenological literature based on the above definitions of xenology as the study of life on other worlds, including the Superman mythos itself.

There are too many examples of the inextricability between science fiction and xenology to innumerate here in full. That said, examples of xenological inquiry from 19th and 20th century science fiction include, but are not limited to, the following: Achille Eyraud's *Voyage to Venus* (1865) which presents the first fictional visit to Venus; Garret Putnam Serviss' *A Columbus of Space* (1909), another Venusian adventure which, however, presents a species of ape-like cave dwellers and attractive telepathic humanoids; Jacob Astor's *A Journey in*

Other Worlds (1894) which presents excursions to Saturn and thriving jungle habitats on Jupiter, complete with dinosaurs; *Psi Cassiopeia* written by Charles Ischir Defontenay (1854) which presents a voyage beyond our local solar system; David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), which similarly presents an extrasolar adventure-romance to the planet Tormance by spacecraft, and details the various adventures of its protagonist with said planet's inhabitants; Mark Wickes' *To Mars Via the Moon* (1911), which presents a Martian adventure in which telepathic Martians have used advanced canal-building technology to construct a utopian socialist system of government. Similar themes of social, ethical and scientific perfection that reflect terrestrial failings and desires, albeit expressed through the uncanny Otherness of extra-terrestrial beings, can be noted in Kurd Lasswitz' *Concerning Two Planets* (1897), which describes Martians who physically resemble human beings but are comparatively super-advanced in terms of their ethics, social and physical sciences (Freitas Jr. 2008).

There are also science fictional accounts of extra-terrestrial societies that often employ professional anthropologists or xenologists in their diegeses that act as viewpoint characters. Murray Leinster's "Anthropological Note" (1957), Gordon R. Dickson's *Wolfing* (1969), Eleanor Arnason's "A Woman of the Iron People" (1991), and Robert Reed's *The Well of Stars* (2005), are examples of such an approach to the questions and problems posed by the diegetic interaction between diegetic Otherness and diegetic humanity. The inverse

perspective and study is also represented in science fiction, namely accounts of extra-terrestrials undertaking xenological studies of humankind. These include Nancy Kress' *An Alien Light* (1988), and Sheila Finch's "Nor Unbuild the Cage" (2000).

According to Freitas Jr., xenology is both a composite and speculative analytical framework. It incorporates various terrestrial scientific and theoretical concepts, praxes, and disciplines ranging from semiology to ethnography, cosmology to fashion, theoretical physics to law. Freitas Jr. presents the various scientific and philosophical problems, questions and theories inherent to xenological thinking in an accessible and thought-provoking manner. That said, the text's inability to answer the very same questions it raises is testament to the implicit problem of the concept of radical Otherness. For all Freitas Jr.'s thorough research and nuanced application thereof to questions and ideas of radical Otherness, the conclusions he draws in many, if not all of his text's twenty-seven chapters, are speculative. In other words, what Fredric Jameson calls 'The Unknowability Thesis' in chapter 8 of his text *Archaeology of the Future* (2005), which is at the core of xenological speculation, simultaneously propels and undermines xenological inquiry itself. Essentially, 'The Unknowability Thesis' concerns the content and limits of representation of alien otherness. While Jameson directs his analysis of the problem of radical Otherness in terms of unknowability primarily toward Stanislaw Lem's sentient 'ocean'-being in *Solaris* (1961), his discussion of 'First Contact' with alien beings

and the onto-existential and epistemological limits of subsequent human attempts to understand it also relates to Superman as a science fictional representation of alien Otherness. As such, the ethic of xenology has no recourse but to assume that Terran science has some purchase, however small, on basic universal principles and proceed accordingly. With that in mind, I have chosen to refer to the term and its substantive meanings, which essentially all refer to Otherness and difference, as a means of highlighting the thematic and narratological importance of Superman's Otherness within the context of the character's diegetic mythos and its representation of the interaction between human and non-human beings.

The problem of unknowability is primarily twofold. Firstly, humanity has not encountered extra-terrestrials extradiegetically, meaning that Otherness manifest in the idea of alien life-forms remains radically unknown. Secondly, despite the wide range of extra-terrestrials diegetically represented in science fiction, regardless of how uncanny or abstract, human conceptions of 'alienness' are always-already reducible to anthropic frames of reference, and are always-already portrayed through fundamentally anthropic systems of thought and action. Similarly, Stableford comments on the underlying anthropocentrism of xenological inquiry, stating that

“ethnological perspectives took over from theological ones in the further extrapolation of long-standing discussions of the plurality of worlds, reconfiguring the notion of the inhabitants of other worlds as “alternative

humankinds". In a sense, the move is an extrapolation of the generalizing impulse of anthropology, viewing cultural development as a universal phenomenon of which the currently available examples happen to be human ones." (Stableford 571).

Jameson also cautions against xenology's latent predisposition toward anthropocentrism in *Archaeology of the Future* (2005). Freitas Jr. and Jameson both state, implicitly and explicitly, that the idea of the intercession of an alien being into a human history necessitates, even on a rudimentary basis, the production of new qualities, new ways of perceiving and new ways of being in ways that do not, in the attempt to produce descriptions, concepts, or symbols for these new qualities of being, simply reconfigure terrestrial concepts in alternative combinations in order to signify for life-forms that originate outside their frame of reference.

On the one hand, the concept of a radically different mode of life that does not inextricably refer to terrestrial spaces, praxes and histories in any way is a scientifically, philosophically, aesthetically and narratologically fascinating and attractive idea. Such hypothetical and radically Other modes of being simultaneously speak to humanity's fears and desires concerning power, powerlessness and onto-existential freedom in terms of the complex and myriad potentials of non-human being. On the other hand, xenological theories concerning Other modes of being are limited to an invariably human experience of being. There is no alien lexicon through which to think or even imagine the

onto-existential experience of being Other. In short, the constituent categories typically referred to in the understanding of terrestrial forms of life named by Freitas Jr. – growth, feeding/metabolism, motility, irritability, reproduction, adaptation, and evolution – are terrestrial concepts of life. While characters like Superman expresses some but not all of the above signs-of-life, said categories of terrestrial being are too provincial to use as definitive criteria for assessing the Otherness of a Kryptonian. As a fictional representation of alien Otherness, the character Superman attests to and demonstrates these limits while, ironically, gesturing beyond them. Superman, therefore, occupies a liminal space between a representation of self (human being) and Other (alien). Despite its limits, xenology offers helpful ways of beginning to re-asses the character not only as a mild-mannered reporter, or small-town farmboy from Smallville, but as what the character is before or beneath, namely an uncanny alien being.

Jameson also refers to this representational problem as the 'Chimera problem,' which refers to whether or not it is possible for human beings as they currently are to “imagine anything that is not already [...] derived from sensory knowledge (and a sensory knowledge which is that of our own ordinary human body and world)” (Jameson 120). Jameson offers two possible outcomes regarding the Chimera problem. First, the Chimera, “the allegedly new thing, will be an ingeniously cobbled together object in which secondary features of our own world are primary in the new one.” Second, that “the new object will be pseudo-sensory alone, and in reality put together out of so many abstract

intellectual senses which are somehow able to pass themselves off as sensory” (Jameson 120). As such, the best albeit unavailable solution to the Chimera problem, and xenology by extension, is an alien lexicon. Whether or not such a solution is feasible, the latent disruption of terrestrial lexical systems by the onto-existential complexities of non-human life-forms calls to mind the necessity of new ways of speaking, conceptualizing, and symbolizing. Based on the idea of the interaction between alien life-forms with one another, this process of radical re-imagination applies not only to the thing perceived (the Other), but the perceiver (human beings) as well.

This idea, inherent in the Otherness of characters like Superman, is daunting, exciting, and terrible because it diegetically presents radical socio-economic, biological, scientific, and philosophical implications that aid in speculating on alternative ways of extradiegetic being. Though the problem of diegetically representing the Other in the form of alien life-forms presents seemingly insuperable conundrums, such attempts also present the opportunity “to be able to imagine a new [quality of being, which] is allegorical of the possibility of imagining a whole new social world” (Jameson, 120).

In terms of my chosen method, when discussing Superman in terms of radical onto-existential difference or Otherness, it would seem that an appropriate strategy would be an extropian or transhumanist approach. Extrope or Extropian(ism) refers to a set of scientific and ethical principles which focus on an approach to life that seeks to improve the human condition through the

careful and ethical application of scientific and technological means. The extropian ethic is predicated on a technological constituent whereby extropian optimism and technocentric ethic suggest that the accelerated self-transformation of humanity to posthumanity is not will not only be technologically possible, but is a telos to be actively and joyously pursued. "Posthuman" is a term used by transhumanists to refer to what humanity could become if it were to succeed in using technology, hardware (for faster more durable bodies) and wetware (for improved psycho-emotional functions, including the transfer of consciousness between bodies), to overcome the limitations of the human condition.

As with xenology, there is an admittedly speculative aspect to this approach due to the fact that what a posthuman might be, do, or think is, as yet, unknown to modern science in any comprehensive way. That said, within the broad extropian ethos, the concept of 'posthuman' can be contrasted with 'human.' As such, posthumans could be described, broadly, as human beings, who through the ethical application of science and technology, would be able to overcome biological, neurological, and psychological imperatives that developed over thousands of years of evolutionary processes. As such, posthumans would, speculatively, be able to configure all aspects of their onto-existential conditions, from the nature of their physical form and its function, including aging and perhaps even death, their psycho-emotional responses to phenomena and stimuli, and cognitive faculties including data processing and transmission that

exceed human models heretofore experienced and understood. As such, transhumanists, extropians and futurists posit that genetic engineering, neural-computer integration, biomedicine and nanobiotechnology, regenerative medicine, and the cognitive sciences will be some of the techno-biological approaches instrumental in achieving the aforementioned transhumanist goals. Such thinkers and texts in the field include, but are not limited to, Max More (*Principles of Extropy* Version 3.11, 2003 and *Extropy: The Journal of Transhumanist Thought*, 1990); Teilhard de Chardin (*The Future of Man*, 1959); FM-2030, born Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (*Woman, Year 2000* 1972); Robert Ettinger (*Man into Superman* 1972); Damien Broderick (*The Judas Mandala* 1982); Natasha Vita-More ("TransArt," 1982); Robert Pepperell (*Post-Human Condition* 1997); and Ray Kurzweil (*Human 2.0*, 2003)

One of the primary the reasons transhumanist and extropian models of speculating on radical onto-existential difference are insufficient when considering the Otherness of an alien being, albeit fictional, is based on the fact that transhumanism and extropianism rely on 1) an anthropic 'base' or raw material to be 2) technologically transmuted, developed, or altered. Superman, as a fictive representation of alien Otherness within the context of the character's diegetic mythos, is 1) biologically and, therefore, onto-existentially non-human and 2) does not require technological power in order to exhibit what diegetic humans would regard as psycho-physical abilities or powers far beyond not only any human body, but any machine fashioned by human engineering.

However, being that the character is a Kryptonian, I have chosen to discuss the Otherness of Kryptonians as presented in the DC Comics hyperdiegesis by referring to xenological speculation because, though flawed, xenology attempts to maintain a sensitivity toward the onto-existential Otherness of non-human beings, and is therefore helpful in providing a basic speculative framework through which to make observations about said characters, as well as discuss them.

KRYPTONIAN XENOLOGY

Any xenological exploration of Superman as a Kryptonian must contextualize the historical representation of the character's homeworld, namely Krypton itself. Chris Roberson's "Jewel Mountains and Fire Falls: The Lost World of Krypton" appearing in *The Man from Krypton: A Closer Look at Superman* edited by Glenn Yeffeth (2005) offers a helpful starting point. Before John Byrne and Mike Mignola's *Superman: World of Krypton* (2008), *The Krypton Chronicles* Vol. 1, No. 1-3 (September -November 1981) written by E. Nelson Bridwell, illustrated by Curt Swan, like other noteworthy examples of world-building including Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), rigorously and methodically detailed the diegetic representation of Kryptonian culture and history within the Superman mythos. This included appendices detailing glossaries of Kryptonian words and phrases, maps of the planet, and an

annotated family tree of the House of El (Roberson 42). The original narrative and aesthetic representation of the planet Krypton functioned incidentally in the character's burgeoning mythos. It was essentially little more than an aesthetic footnote or space wherein which the diegetic details of Jor and Lara-El's inability to prevent the cataclysmic destruction of their world and the launching of their offspring Kal-El toward the earths of the DC multiverse took place. As a place that simply existed to be destroyed in order to facilitate the genesis of the character's terrestrial adventures, Siegel and Shuster's depiction of the planet, a distant green orb suspended in the blackness of intergalactic space, showed nothing of the planet's history, science or culture, let alone topography or biospheres. This sparsity of detail endured for two decades following the planet's original debut in *Action Comics* No. 1 (1938) due in large part to the numerous non-cohesive narrative and aesthetic representations of the planet by DC's various artist/writer teams that followed. However, a small number of creators, under the guidance of Weisinger's strong editorial vision that promoted consistency and invention regarding the diegetic representation of Superman's home world, resulted in the broad codification of the fictional planet's history, culture, language, geography, science and religion. This included the variegated approach to the provenance of Superman's powers and abilities. As Weldon notes,

“...For thirty-two years, the comics had stuck with Siegel and Shuster's original explanation that Superman's abilities were due to his status as a

member of Krypton's "super-race" of beings capable of leaping tall buildings and learning calculus while still in the nursery – and to Earth's lesser gravity. Yet in *Action* #262 (March, 1960), the notion of a Kryptonian "super-race" goes away for good (perhaps due to Wertham's attacks?) and is replaced, for the first time, by another explanation. As Superman explains to Supergirl (in *Action Comics* #252, her debut), their powers now derive partly from Earth's lesser gravity and partly from "ultra solar rays that penetrate the Earth day and night". The idea that a yellow sun gives superpowers (and that a red one takes them away) was a late development in Superman's history, but one that has remained with him ever since – even as many other Weisinger-era innovations have fluttered in and out of continuity. This strange, detailed, pseudo-scientific apportioning of powers – the need to pore over and explain, to take nothing as read – is a major theme of Weisinger-era Superman." (Weldon 118-9).

Much like the development of Superman itself over the character's publication history, the narrative and aesthetic development of the character's home world can be broadly divided into three stages ranging from 1934 to 1950, 1950 to 1970, and, lastly, 1970 to 1985. The first stage was marked by simplistic and uncoordinated development of the fictional planet, primarily at the hands of Superman's creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. The second stage was marked by Weisinger's elaborative, inventive and expansive additions to the

character's entire mythos. The third stage can be regarded as a period of refinement, codification and delimitation.

Throughout the first decades featuring the planet Krypton in print, “Krypton is presented in only the most cursory fashion, with contradictory details. The reader is given very little sense of it as a living planet with a culture of its own” (Roberson 38). The original appearance of Krypton occurred in the Superman newspaper strips drawn and illustrated by Siegel and Shuster in 1934 that never saw publication in their original form. In the twelve-part newspaper strips the duo originally intended to publish, the reader is given not only interesting insights into the origins of the character, but of its home world also. Of said twelve strips, ten were concerned with the destruction of Krypton, as well as introducing the reader to Superman's fictional forebears Jor-El, preeminent scientist of Kandor (Krypton's capital city), and Lara-El, its spouse.

Originally, the xenological elements of the Kryptonian species were simply hyperextensions of human faculties, as can be noted in the fact that Siegel and Shuster treated Krypton as a world ruled by hyper-evolved “*super-men*” (Roberson 35; italics mine). This unpublished miniseries would later be reformatted as a comic strip in which the nature and history of the planet Krypton were reduced to a single page which focused on the description of Kal-El's powers in a diegetic terrestrial environment that broadly reflected extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality. Neither the last days of Krypton, nor Jor or Lara-El were mentioned. Krypton would only be properly

named in 1939 following the publication of *Action Comics* No. 1. In *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1939), the reader is also given a diegetic explanation of the ontological effects of the differences between Kryptonian and terrestrial climates on Kryptonian physique. According to Siegel, “Superman came to Earth from the planet Krypton, whose inhabitants had evolved, after millions of years, to physical perfection. The smaller size of our planet, with its slighter gravity pull, assists Superman's tremendous muscles in the performance of miraculous feats of strength” (Siegel 1). Though crude, this explanation offered a first step in developing a xenological profile of the fictional Kryptonian species.

In 1945, the character's origins were retold in the debut issue of Superboy appearing in *More Fun Comics* Vol. 1, No. 101. In this text, the xenological profile of Krypton was re-assessed. While Krypton remained a technocratic planet whose social and physical infrastructures were predicated on advanced technology, it was no longer inhabited by a race of superbeings, but rather by beings seemingly indistinguishable from terrestrial humans. This marks another important aspect of the xenological profile of the Kryptonian species; namely, that “all of Superman's abilities now stem from the fact that he is a Kryptonian on Earth, and not because all Kryptonians had been supermen” (Roberson 36-7).

This problem of the unknowability, or at least undecidability, concerning Superman's xenological onto-existentialism has also been acknowledged by writers and illustrators of the character. According to Will Murray article “Superman's Editor Mort Weisinger” re-printed in Eury's *The Krypton Companion*

(2006),

“The Space Race of the late 1950s and '60s also forced Weisinger to stay his toes with kids who liked fantasy, but demanded a recognizable dose of realism mixed in. Students at MIT monitored the feature for violations of the laws of physics. When hundreds of letters complained about Superman taking Lois Lane into outer space without the benefit of a pressure suit, Weisinger decreed that from that point on, Superman had to place her in a NASA-style astronaut garb...Perhaps most significantly, Mort Weisinger reinvented the Man of Steel for this increasingly sophisticated audience. “Why Should Superman fly?” he once asked rhetorically. “So he came from another planet and there’s a difference in gravity. Why should he be able to fly? Why should he have X-ray vision? It’s contrary to science and reason. I originated the concept that in a world circling a yellow sun his powers are multiplied, and that yellow sun gave him these abilities. There are things that originators of Superman didn’t figure out; they gave us this fabulous character without explaining why all his fabulous attributes existed.” (Murray 12-13)

The second stage of the narrative and aesthetic development of Krypton in print came at the hands of Jerry Siegel and Mort Weisinger, most notably in *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 242 (July, 1958). The narrative introduced the technological supervillain Brainiac into the character’s mythos. As a collector, Brainiac’s diegetic telos is to travel throughout the universe discovering alien

worlds and civilizations and subsequently using its advanced technology to shrink their premier cities, subsequently storing them in what appear to be clear bell jars. In the text, Brainiac attempts to shrink Paris and other world capitals on that story's earth. Infiltrating the villain's spacecraft, Superman discovers the bottled city of Kandor. The character is able to tour the once capital city of its bygone world, discovering its technology and agriculture, thereby presenting the reader with a clearer example of the socio-culture and history of the fictional planet. Another fuller exploration would emerge through the publication of *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 252 (May, 1959) the following year. In the story, Superman accidentally travels back in time to a pre-cataclysmic Krypton. While there, the character is mistaken for an extra in a science fiction film being shot, meets its forbears Jor and Lara-El, witnesses their marriage, and even falls in love with the Kryptonian actress Lyla Lerrol. This story added another element to the xenological profile of the Kryptonian species in that it contrasted Krypton's red sun to earth's yellow sun, identifying this difference as the source of the character's powers on a diegetic earth, albeit without providing a scientific, or even pseudo-scientific, explanation for the character's abilities from that point to its present incarnation. In *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 141 (November, 1960), Krypton's geography was named, introducing the reader to such fictional xenogeographic locations as pre-cataclysmic Krypton's Rainbow Canyon, Jewel Mountains, Hall of Worlds, Gold Volcano and Meteor Valley (Roberson 39). By 1961, *Superman* Vol.1, No. 146 (July, 1961) coalesced these disparate

elements into the first broadly cohesive xenological profile of the Kryptonian species. Despite the notion of Krypton being a fictional world located light-years away from a diegetic earth, this text presented Kryptonians as reterritorialized middle-class Americans living in a technological utopia featuring weather control towers, metal-eaters and metal maids.

The third stage of Krypton's diegetic narrative and aesthetic development occurred under the editorship of Julius Schwartz, who took up the position following the resignation of Weisinger in 1970. With the diligent historiographical study of the preceding portrayals of Krypton, writers E. Nelson Bridwell, Cary Bates, Elliot S! Maggin, Marv Wolfman, and Dennis O'Neil used a series of stories published under the title "The Fabulous World of Krypton" that ran throughout the early 1970s *Superman* titles to codify the Kryptonian mythos. These stories read like vignettes, each using only a few pages to highlight and explore a specific aspect of Kryptonian culture and history. Such aspects include the planet's colonization by two lost space travelers named Kryp and Tonn, their descendants' barbarity and civil war, and their slow re-development toward technological superiority. These stories also featured hyperdiegetic legends about the planet's pre-cataclysmic heroes including Hex-Le and Rik-Ar, a Spartacus-esque leader of a slave rebellion against a despot named Taka-Ne. Other narratives focused on Superman's forebears more closely, detailing the contents of Jor-El's personal diaries, for example. As such, "The Fabulous World of Krypton" miniseries helped distill a clear diegetic vision of the alien world of

Krypton. It is clear that Byrne and Mignolas' representation of Krypton in *Superman: The World of Krypton* (2008) is highly indebted to the scholastic intrepidity of Bridwell, which subsequently allowed the team to draw on Bridwell's accumulation of detailed aspects of Kryptonian culture and history, including but not limited to the months of the Kryptonian calendar, its units of measurement including time, the titles and forms of social address, deportment and decorum, funerary customs, weddings, technology, and helial worship of Rao, their sun and premier deity.

SUPERMAN, XENOLOGICAL UNKNOWABILITY AND TRIDENITY

Despite any moral or ethical considerations of what or who Superman is diegetically, such considerations must also give an account of the character's xenoonto-existentialism that gestures beyond the anthropocentrically normative method artists and writers have used to represent the character. This task is not altogether straightforward. The determination of what the character is or might be is, bio-physically, not entirely within the purview of diegetic terran science. How can any terran or extra-terrestrial, extradiegetic or diegetic, assume that based on its physiological similarities to the human species, the character's body produces some of the non-physical phenomena common to human beings as well? Does Superman dream, or fantasize? Does Superman have an identical emotional spectrum to human beings and if not, is the character able to

feel, dream, or imagine in ways human beings cannot?

Initially, these questions and considerations might appear unnecessarily painstaking. However, I argue that these aspects of the character's diegetic being are a fundamental part of its Otherness and the Otherness of its body. Its uncanny similarity to human beings invites the reader's inter-diegetic comparison of the differences between fictional Kryptonians' bodies and the lives of those bodies against both extradiegetic and diegetic representations of human bodies and their lives. This conscious or unconscious comparative process is, by definition, xenological in that a human being compares her/his human being to the being of an alien, in Superman's case, a Kryptonian. The character's body's uncanny likeness to that of a human male who engaged in regular physical exercise, makes the task of imaging the nature of Superman's alien body somewhat easier. This is to say that it is not so highly abstract – like the 'oceanic' organism of Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*, for example – so as to be mystified in ostensibly epistemic and ontic riddles.

Instead, with Superman, the reader is given an imagining of an alien body, a physique of the Other, that is an uncanny reflection of an extradiegetic human body. Its anthropomorphism, in this sense, is functionalist in so far as it facilitates the reader's identification with it, making the narrative function in its dissemination of the various themes associated with Superman, from solitude to heroism. Essentially, this anthropomorphism is a method of contextualizing and domesticating or terraforming the Otherness of the alien body through the actual

conceptualization and aesthetic representation of the alien body itself. Here terraforming refers to the theoretical process whereby typically inhospitable extra-terrestrial geologies, atmospheres, topographies, or ecologies of planets, moons, or other bodies are made to conform to terrestrial standards as dictated by Earth's biosphere and therefore habitable. However, the character consistently embodies a sense of anthropomorphic privileging that invites the reader to assume that the character is at all understandable because it resembles her or him. Superman, as an aesthetic and narratological representation of Otherness therefore fulfills a “necessarily normative [function], and reestablishes the model of a norm even there where it is unthinkable” (Jameson 123). As such, the alien body, as represented by the character, is a space which is underpinned by a tension between the representable and the unrepresentable. With Superman,

“if we emphasize the latter side of the tension, we then begin to tilt back towards the notion that genuine difference, genuine alienness or otherness, is impossible and unachievable, and that even there where it seems to have been successfully represented, in reality we find the mere structural play of purely human themes and topics.” (Jameson 124)

As stated above, Jameson's configuration of the Chimera problem is one of perception. That is, how a human being might regard an alien in a way that was faithful to the onto-existential reality of said being, diegetic or otherwise. With Superman, I argue that the Chimera problem manifests itself in terms of the

tensions between identity, power and Otherness, and the character's three personas, namely 'Kal-El of Krypton,' 'Clark Kent of Smallville,' and 'Superman of earth,' which I refer to collectively as the character's 'tridentity.' While it may seem appropriate to regard any identarian tension within the character in terms of a dualism between 'Clark Kent' and 'Superman,' I argue that the character's onto-existential configuration is triangular as opposed to binary.

Looking at Superman's tridentity more closely, I propose that 'Superman' is a sign that refers to one third of a fractured and displaced entity. Beside, within, underneath, or above Superman are also 'Clark Kent' and 'Kal-El.' These three primary signs refer to attributes, characteristics and modes of being of an entity of power and Otherness commonly referred to 'Superman' within the character's diegetic mythos. While such an observation may seem overly pedantic, sensitivity to the fractured nature of the character is essential in reading it xenologically, as well as reading the nature of its power xenologically also. The fact that the signs 'Superman,' 'Clark Kent,' and 'Kal-El' are put in place of, over, under, or alongside one another in the place of the thing itself, reflects how the character's power and Otherness defer all the above-mentioned signs in any categorical or definitive way.

'Superman' refers to and recognizes the activity of a being of power that uses said power in the service of diegetic humanity as a paragon, defender, and disseminator of a narrow moral and ethical ideology. It is given value because when people come under threat of harm through the course of its adventures,

be it in the form of a natural disaster or from the activity of the character's enemies – be they aliens themselves like Doomsday or human, like Lex Luthor – 'Superman' is that part of the fractured and displaced entity that matters because it is the part that is needed within the context of the narrative.

'Superman' is only meaningful when it stands in relation to any danger that threatens to destabilize or erode the moral and ethical foundations of diegetic civilizations and their attendant apparatuses and structures.

'Clark Kent' and 'Kal-El' are just as present (and, in fact, non-present) when the character is performing its various feats and marvels, but they are of lesser value, invisible or overrun by 'Superman' and its differentiating context of danger and the defence of 'truth' and 'justice.' Clark Kent is a forced equivalence between two radically different yet superficially similar forms of being. In this way, 'Clark Kent' is a prosthesis of origin. By this phrase, I mean that it is a sign that refers to an aesthetic phenomena that is created to exist in the place of the character's non-existent native humanity within the diegetic context of its terrestrial experience. 'Clark Kent' stands in for the alienness of its being. As a result, the Other is substituted with a simulation of manhood in a way that seemingly disqualifies its Otherness and rituals that accompany it, made largely unavailable due to the loss of their space of origin and practice, namely Krypton itself. 'Clark Kent' acts as a root or an anchor that binds the character to the purview of the andro and the anthropocentric in the many earths of the DC hyperdiegesis, delimiting its experiences as subject both of as well as to human

being. Superman is essentially different from humanity, however, even as a fluid configuration in this way, it has been made to adapt readily to various human social pressures and historical situations reproduced in the histories of the DC Comics Multiverse. 'Clark Kent' is also a veil that functions simultaneously as a form of concealment and exposure that renders the character's fundamental alterity to all things human invisible, while simultaneously facilitating its exposure to and experience of everything human.

'Clark Kent' also functions as a reader identification apparatus within the context of its narratives. Inherent in the idea of 'Clark Kent' being an effective reader identification tool is the paradoxical simultaneity of limitation and supremacy. This paradox inheres in the fact that 'Clark Kent's' diegetic hollowness, spinelessness, and lack of grace or strength call out to the reader who also lives in an extradiegetic reality that produces and sustains feelings of existential clumsiness, isolation, anomie, and fatigue. In this way, the character's fractured being interpellates – that is calls out to and recognizes – the reader's feelings of onto-existential fracture and disintegration, and ameliorates them in the iconic process of Clark's phone booth transformation into 'Superman,' for example.

Symbolically, this transformation shows the 'fiction suit' that is Clark, being peeled off and discarded to temporarily allow the essential, true, or real being of transcendent power to emerge. The logic of this transformation is that the man, which to Superman is other, is overcome to reveal the alien which to

humanity is Other. This process also suggests that a miraculous synthesis has occurred. The phone booth appears to be like a crucible in which the raw materials of 'Kal-El' and the terrestrial ideals of 'Clark Kent' are synthesized in 'Superman,' the supreme version of the combination between the human and the Other. The phone booth transformation further suggests to the reader that, like Clark/Superman, deep within the detritus of post-nuclear existence, something extraordinary with potential enough to burst through the quotidian and take to the sky, powerful and free, still exists within the reader her/himself.

Beyond the obvious seductiveness of this encouraging idea lay certain unavoidable problems. While the transition from 'Clark' to 'Superman' suggests a radical liberation from the limitations of the quotidian and a prohibitive subjection to everything human, from its moral and ethical codes, to the symbols it uses to speak/write them, 'Superman' is just as much a subject to them as Clark Kent is. Diegetically, as a reporter for the Daily Planet, the object of Clark's habitual, day-to-day actions is to observe, collect, and collate data about human bodies and their being. It subsequently disseminates this data through the ideological State apparatuses that affect mass culture primarily in the form of online and print media. In this sense, Clark is the 'eye' and 'mouth' of the State, whose job is to diffuse the grand narratives of the State among its subjects. More extremely, as Superman, the object of its habitual, day-to-day actions as a so-called hero is to enforce and reify a strict set of moral and ethical precepts that ensure the maintenance of the same socio-political systems, codes, and

ideologies that exacerbate various forms of suffering for the human beings subject to them. As such, the phone booth transformation transforms Clark from being the 'eye' and 'mouth' of the State, into the 'fist' of the State. Consequently, the phone booth transformation and the freedom and power it intimates is not as free or powerful as may initially appear. Ultimately, it suggests that this freedom is always-already subject to the power of human ideology.

Diegetically, 'Kal-El' is the 'Last Son of Krypton' more in name than lived experience as the character's opportunity to grow up as the offspring of Jor-El and Lara Van-El was interrupted by the destruction of Krypton. It knows its forebears and their culture only simulacracally that is, through indirect means. Therefore, the character's sense of Otherness is felt on both sides, human and Kryptonian alike. For example, consider the following conversation between Superman and Zod, newly released from the Phantom Zone but trapped in a cell in the menagerie of the Fortress of Solitude (a place where Superman keeps and tends a variety of rare and dangerous extraterrestrial creatures), in *Superman/Wonder Woman* No. 4 (March, 2014):

SUPERMAN: "Hello Zod."

ZOD: "Do you speak Kryptonian?" (in Kryptonian)

SUPERMAN: "I do" (in Kryptonian)

ZOD: "You learned it from a Matrix, no? I can hear it in your accent. Or
LACK of one. Flat, like a machine"

SUPERMAN: "...That's right." (Soule 5)

What Zod is alluding to is the fact that 'Kal-El' is a simulacra, a sign without a referent, an incomplete sign. 'Kal-El' refers to a diegetic family, lineage, house (the House of El), people, ecosystem, history, state, ideological and symbolic economy, and a planet that no longer exist. After the diegetic destruction of Krypton, an event concurrent with its own birth in most of the character's origin stories, Superman has no extended access to the referent of this sign. Its existence, as a Kryptonian marooned on an earth, always-already displaces or defers the completion of this sign. Kal-El can never either be fully human nor fully Kryptonian. The only access it has to the referent of the sign 'Kal-El' is always-already absent, both in terms of time and space. As such, 'Kal-El' will always-already refer to a ghost of a bygone world. When read in this way, the character is a composite of incomplete and spectral signs that are all stretched over the vast and seemingly inexhaustible foundation of a powerful alien body that can never singularly or jointly encapsulate the disruptivity of the power and Otherness of said body. Though these signs work to take the place of the present entity within the context of DC's Multiverse of earths, its power and Otherness always-already break through and disrupt 'Superman,' 'Clark Kent,' and 'Kal-El.' The character's power and Otherness contravene the boundaries between themselves. It is the irreducibility of its disruptivity that crosses them, that makes their artifice appear, as well as their violence, meaning the consequences of the particular relations of State-determined repressive force that are concentrated and capitalized therein.

In view of Superman's tridentity, I argue that any reading of the character that endeavours to discuss its xenology based on its diegetic qualities, would be remiss if it did not acknowledge that the means of engaging with it are unstable from the outset. In being simultaneously Clark Kent, Kal-El, & Superman, the character is existentially always-already elsewhere. To definitively experience it is a problem that is always-already in play; not only because of the character's immense power and speed, which question the human ability, aided or unaided, to actually perceive it (to definitively see Superman in motion with the naked eye, for example), but because of its complex of identities, one is never speaking about or speaking to a single, distinct identity. Within the diegetic context of the character's mythos, no single aspect of Superman's identities is primary. They are all ephemeral effects of that which is independent therefrom namely, its power, body, and Otherness. As such, I argue that Superman is best understood as a multiplicity.

The term multiplicity here refers to the fact that while Superman's being on a diegetic earth may ostensibly appear integrated and complementary, the multiplicity of Clark, Kal, and Superman offers an illusory coherence that runs through its power, body, and Otherness. The multiplicity of Superman's tridentity is also constantly disrupted and made incoherent by these three underlying onto-existential aspects of its being. This means that Clark Kent, Superman, and Kal-El are in a state of continuous differentiation in which they are arbitrary to a degree for two main reasons. First, remove them and its power, Otherness, and

body persist, acting as the character's residual onto-existential content.

Throughout the course of the character's publication history, and within the context of the narrative and aesthetic demands of its diegetic mythos, Superman regularly connects its body, Otherness and power to this seemingly closed circuit of interchangeable personas – swapping them, substituting, and replacing them for one another. In this play of personalities, the character's power, body, and Otherness remain irreducible, intransitive, essential. Second, its power, body, and Otherness do not require Clark, Kal, or Superman to constitute or substantiate them; they are independent of them. In this way, the character's tridentity engenders its own collapse back into power and Otherness because of the always-already immanence of the power and Otherness of its body.

What results from the character's multiplicity is a mode of being that is always-already in a process of construction and collapse. Its diegetic existence is deeply paradoxical because it both is and is not Clark, Kal, or Superman in any absolute sense. Simultaneously being and not-being Clark, Kal, and Superman means being not an onto-existential open, or closed circuit, but a short circuit; whereby, each one of its lives and realities, each bearing a load of different potential and resistance toward the power, body, and Otherness that course through and constitute them, are always-already incomplete. It is fitting that the character's two primary personae, 'Superman' and 'Clark,' share the same abbreviation as an electrical short circuit (s/c). This is because the character's power, body and Otherness connect abnormally with primarily two

nodes of self/identity in which different onto-existential levels of power are in constant negotiation. However, as with a short circuit, there is a danger that the performances of self/identity, namely 'Clark Kent' and 'Superman,' which require that the being wearing them resist any impulse to fully release its power results in a repression and, therefore, excess of power. Should the character's resistance to the underlying forces engendering its own onto-existential multiplicity in order to co-exist with humanity, a mode of being it assimilates on a diegetic earth, fail, there is potential for Superman to cause fires and explosions, in short destroy or damage a diegetic world, like an excessive current in a short circuit. Because of this onto-existential multiplicity, Superman has been characterized as being a son, an orphan, a sole survivor trying to gesture homeward to a home that no longer exists, a hero and protector in a world where trouble does not end though it has the power to potentially end all troubles either by destroying said world or imposing its will upon it in a total manner, a husband/friend/lover to Lois/Jimmy, a rival to Lex, an employee to Perry White and so on. If the character's being, being fractured in this way, is always in a perpetual state of construction and collapse, the radical implication is that it is never either of these things in any complete, total or perhaps even fulfilling way. Its diegetic being is one of reserve. Due to the inflexible and repetitive use of its power within the framework of its circuitous narratives that typically repeat the basic narrative structure of perception of threat as Clark-transformation into Superman-superpowered intercession as Superman-struggle

against said threat as Superman-victory over said threat as Superman-transformation back into Clark-reporting on Superman's struggle against and victory over said threat as Clark, the character's being is constantly prolonging itself, (re)starting again and again, over and over. Therefore, diegetically, Superman is a creature whose existence is marked by paradoxical movements of continuous variation, of disrupted or ruptured stratification, a matrix of continuous change founded on its power, body and Otherness.

In this way, Superman could be read as a model of post-identarian subjectivity in that the character's being is not organized by a central self because its power, body, and Otherness always-already disrupt and divide the phenomena of Clark, Kal, and Superman. As such, Kal, Clark, and Superman are performances that leave no permanent trace on the power, body and Otherness that constitute them. The character is best described as an admixture of the organic (the residual aspects of its being namely the power, uncanniness, and Otherness of its body) and the inorganic (the performances of Clark, Kal, Superman superimposed upon and reified through it) aspects of its being. In turn, the performances of Clark and Superman both mitigate and discharge the power and Otherness of the body through which they are expressed. As such, Superman's tridentity and its power, body, and Otherness are mutually disruptive. In terms of the character's diegetic relationship to diegetic human beings, it is a non-parallel and symbiotic entity that is always-already becoming something else, always-already suggesting potentially Other ways of being,

albeit in a typically circuitous yet disrupted way. While Clark, Kal, and Superman might gesture to a connectivity or synthesis between Kryptonian and human being, they fail to do so in a linearly. What results is a de-cantered milieu that is Superman, though a character with a beginning and three essential elements, it also has no existential endpoint or definitive closure to date, literally exemplified by having twice overcome death. This sense of paradoxical onto-existential openness and closure in the character is further compounded by the fact that the upper reaches of its power remain unknown, the secrets of its bio-chemistry remain unanswered, and the depths of its 'psychological profile' remain unfathomed within the diegetic context of its mythos.

Superman, being both extra-terrestrial and terrestrial in various ways and to varying degrees, turns its diegetic earths into assemblages, ones with radically de-cantered, non-anthropocentric or even geocentric, histories and futures. What it means to be and live on such an earth becomes something else in the wake of Superman-on-an-earth. The character's mythos therefore allows the reader to imagine and speculate, in an essentially xenological fashion, how being on such an earth necessarily becomes an assemblage of the terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial whereby each type or mode of being appropriates from the other. On the one hand, diegetic human beings constantly use or rely on the character's powers to redress problems they lack the power to resolve themselves. On the other hand, Superman constantly uses or borrows these diegetic earths and human beings for asylum, as foster homes, as borrowed

territories that afford it identity and solace from solitude. It does not typically conquer or destroy them or use its power to consciously and definitively change them, in spite of the fact that even merely being in the territory of these earths irrevocably changes them as anthropocentric spaces of human domination and supremacy. In view of the disruptive nature of the character being Other, powerful, and uncanny, it necessarily changes the territory of these earths, transforming them and being therein into something other than what their humanity's had heretofore experienced. Ideally, the power, body, and Otherness that comprise the character's multiplicity would have co-generative influences over the territories of these earths and the modes of being therein: the terraformed being in being on a terra reforms its territory.

For these reasons, I understand Superman, Clark Kent, and Kal-El as consistently mutating strata of the character's being: they are accumulations, in the sense of creating a persona that interacts with human beings on Earth and accrues experiences as Clark; coagulations, in the sense of the joining of its understanding of human being, its fears and needs accrued by Clark with the power, body, and Otherness of its Kryptonian heritage in Superman; sedimentations, in the sense of the residual aspects of its being namely, power, the body, and Otherness which are symbolized by its alien heritage in its Kryptonian name, Kal-El; and foldings, In the sense of the continuous process of negotiating these aspects of its being on Earth – all together and apart. These strata have a unity in the power, body, and Otherness of the character, a

sustained yet mutating coherence. From the always-already disruptivity inherent in Superman's power come strata of being that are continually re-created and renewed. Mark Waid eloquently describes this continual process, noting that the character

“has vague dreamlike memories of his lost home world, particularly every evening at dusk, when he feels an inexplicable sadness and longing in watching the setting sun turn red on the horizon. And every time, in his Clark identity, that he has to politely forego a pickup touch-football game for fear of crippling the opposing line, every time he hears the splash of an Antarctic penguin while trying to relax on a Hawaiian beach, every time he surrenders himself to a moment of unbridled joy and looks down to see that he's quite literally walking on air, he gets the message loud and clear: He's not from around here. He doesn't belong here. He was raised as one of us, but he's really not one of us. Superman is the sole survivor of his race. He is an alien being.” (Waid 8)

Every time the character changes into Clark Kent/Superman, every time Superman is reminded that it is the last survivor of a dead planet, such realizations predicate an xenoonto-existential renewal. However, its being is discharged through these strata all the time. As such, this process of xenoonto-existential renewal and re-creation is continuous. What is at stake here? The disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness enjoins readers to reconsider the relations and forces acting upon and through the diegetic

narrative and aesthetic representations of bodies, that is, human bodies, animal bodies, social bodies, bodies of ideas and their limits, and the linguistic bodies that it disrupts simply by being on these diegetic earths. While typically Superman sees the diegetic earths of its mythos as spaces of asylum, not as sites of bondage despite the limits human being necessarily impose and maintain in and around its being, the xenological disruptivity of the character's power, body, and Otherness ultimately gesture to the utopian/dystopian potential to radically and actively revalue all values that have prevailed on such earths heretofore, as Jameson suggests.



Fig. xxi. taken from *DC Comics Presents* Vol.1, No. 85 "The Jungle Line" (September, 1985) written by Alan Moore, illustrated by Rick Veitch. p.g. 7.

In essence, Superman divides into a manifest and latent content.

Consider the above image from *DC Comics Presents* No. 85. The story focusses on a dying Superman after being exposed to an infectious and deadly fungus from a meteor fallen to that earth. While attending a lecture and press

conference by one Dr. Everett of the Institute for Extraterrestrial Studies, Clark is infected by the spores of the fungus known on Old Krypton as Bloodmorel.

Symptoms of infection in Kryptonians are detailed in a hyperdiegetic text known as Rem-UI's Almanac of Old Krypton, page 31, entry 5,308 which states,

“Native to the SCARLET JUNGLE, the BLOODMOREL is an unusual and dangerous fungus. It’s preferred GROWTH MEDIUM is BLOOD. To this end, its microscopic SPORES permeate the skin and thrive within the BLOODSTREAM ITSELF...causing FEVER, BOUTS OF INCAPACITATION, HALLUCINATIONS, CHRONIC OVEREXERTION...and eventually, in 92% of ALL known cases...DEATH.” (Moore 5)

Figure xxi. above is important because it concisely captures the problem of identity with Superman. Keywords to note in the image are “hallucinations” and Superman's outburst “you're not real” (Moore 7). The nightmare, I argue, reveals a latent truth about the character. Veitch explicitly emphasizes the unmarked body of Kal-El, in which power and Otherness are localized and (re)produced. Note how the Bloodmorel intensifies the psychological stress of the onto-existential fracture always-already occurring within the character. In addition, Veitch's rendering of the ‘fiction suits’ the character wears in the form of the ‘Clark’ and ‘Superman’ identities is particularly pertinent to my point regarding the fact that neither is more ‘real’ than the other. Moore makes the reader see Superman acknowledge that both Clark and Superman can only be justified as

aesthetic phenomena. They are creations, performances, uniforms. Veitch's aesthetic treatment of this theme privileges neither, making 'Clark,' 'Superman,' and 'Kal' paradoxically visually distinct, but existentially indistinct. Ultimately, all three are in some way spectral, or borrowing a term from Jacques Derrida, hauntological. The term was coined by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1994) in which he attempts to analyze the question "what is a ghost?" (Derrida 10). In short, Derrida's ideas regarding hauntology involve acknowledging the Other that haunts the self, whose spectral and brooding presence pluralizes the certainties of ontology. I am invoking the idea that hauntology describes, in a way, the problem of identity by gesturing to the specter's paradoxical state of being and non-being. As such, Superman is an oxymoronic being in which the essential contradictions of the character can only be reconciled if the conflicting elements (Kal, Clark, and Superman) are defined as arbitrary, de-centered, and/or spectral in nature. Superman's disruptivity is a form specific to superbeings on the diegetic earths of the DC Multiverse, not an absolute content thereof. As I have shown in CHAPTER II, the manifest content of Clark, Kal, and Superman can change from writer to writer, decade to decade, imprint to imprint, or medium to medium and, as such, is coevally arbitrary, a second order. In contrast, the implication of the latent form of the character's disruptivity, its singular body, its Otherness, and its power potentially could belong to a higher order, not of the 'hero', but beyond those of human socio-political and onto-existential codifications altogether, which are, by definition, alien or Other.

In “Rediscovering Nietzsche’s Übermensch in Superman as a Heroic Ideal,” appearing in *Superman and Philosophy: What Would the Man of Steel Do?* (2013) edited by Mar D. White, Arno Bogaerts suggests that

“the real person [...] is the one who journeyed from Krypton to Earth, was raised on a Smallville farm, developed superpowers under a yellow sun, and later combined all his talents and facets of his personality into one harmonious whole. His two “identities” are really nothing more than roles he plays in life, just like the roles each of us play.” (Bogaerts 90)

While I broadly agree with Bogaerts summation, I argue that Superman’s existence is the antithesis of harmonious or whole. A pervasive sense of existential disjointedness is so integral to the character that aside from its power, body, and Otherness, the only thing that can accurately be said to be essential about Superman is that its existence on a diegetic earth, one or many, successive or synchronous, is essentially fractured and incomplete.

The performance of the meek and bumbling Clark Kent, which is as much a performance as the seemingly invincible Man of Steel, simply cannot be elements of a harmonious whole if “neither can claim to be 'more real' than the other” (Bogaerts 90). As Clark, Kal, and Superman concordantly, the character is always-already the exact opposite of itself. Bogaerts further suggests that these performances are not to be understood as parodies of humanity, or an explicit statement of how Superman sees diegetic humanity, as Bill (David Caradine) suggests in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill*, Volume 2 (2004). Largely

inspired by readings of Superman in *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (1965) by Jules Feiffer, Bill states in a monologue

“[...]Now, a staple of the superhero mythology is, there's the superhero and there's the alter ego. Batman is actually Bruce Wayne, Spider-Man is actually Peter Parker. When that character wakes up in the morning, he's Peter Parker. He has to put on a costume to become Spider-Man. And it is in that characteristic Superman stands alone. Superman didn't become Superman. Superman was born Superman. When Superman wakes up in the morning, he's Superman. His alter ego is Clark Kent. His outfit with the big red "S", that's the blanket he was wrapped in as a baby when the Kent's found him. Those are his clothes. What Kent wears - the glasses, the business suit - that's the costume. That's the costume Superman wears to blend in with us. Clark Kent is how Superman views us. And what are the characteristics of Clark Kent. He's weak... he's unsure of himself... he's a coward. Clark Kent is Superman's critique on the whole human race.” (Tarantino 2004).

This evaluation of the character's humanity contra Otherness is evidenced by early Superman stories that held Clark Kent as the disguise and Superman as the “real” personality. However, following the 1985 to 1986 *Crisis on Infinite Earths* continuity reboot, John Byrne's *Man of Steel* miniseries reversed the Superman/Clark Kent dyad by portraying Clark Kent as more confident. In addition, contemporary retellings of Superman's origin, including *Superman:*

Birthright (2003), *Superman: Secret Origin* (2009–2010) and *Action Comics* Vol. 2 (2011), combine story and personality traits from both interpretations. Despite these interpretive variances, I argue that the underlying truth of Clark, Kal, and Superman is the fact that all three are inextricably aesthetic phenomena. It therefore stands to reason that Superman's understanding or stance toward diegetic humanity would be as prone to flux as its own performance of it as a socio-politically, onto-existentially, and chronotopally variable phenomena would be.

Regardless of whether Clark Kent is viewed as a parody/counterfeit of human being or not, the point I stress is that the difference between say Batman and Superman, for example, is that the former is a man playing at being a god, the latter is a god playing at being a man. While there is a creative attempt at overcoming the limits of one self in either instance, there is also an undeniable measure of self-denial in both as well. It is not so much a question of which is the 'real' identity between Clark, Kal, or Superman. Ultimately, the character's selves subsist in a relative and limited form. If one considers all the things its power, body, and Otherness allow it to think (understand), see (perceive), and do (create/destroy) as I will show later in this CHAPTER, within the context of the radical narrative and aesthetic possibilities of a diegetic world or worlds available to a Kryptonian on such an earth, then the character's routine performances of Superman and Clark Kent are extremely limited and relative expressions of its being. They are self-created identities, they are choices, and

these choices have consequences that affect being on these earths.

Whether consciously or not, Superman's presence on diegetic earths forces their humanities to reconsider themselves. Xenologically, I argue that part of the appeal of the character is the threat and potential of the coming of the Other, as well as the threat and potential of humanity overcoming itself, becoming Other to itself, that Superman represents. As a character immersed in the concepts of power, the body, and Otherness, Superman effectively raises the question of whether or not it is a representation of a mode of being which can declare itself fully without being trapped in the polarized dialectic of redeemer contra destroyer. Within the remit of xenological speculation outlined above, I argue that Superman is special precisely because the disruptivity of its power and Otherness are always acting, present, or expressed in such a way that always-already absolves it of human being and its attendant aporias. Inherent in the xenological conception of the character is the notion that, even while inculcated in the various contradictions of human being as represented in the context of the diegetic earths of the character's mythos, and familiar in this way, the character is also always-already unfamiliar, Other and new to them. As a result, regardless of what moral or ethical apparatuses are brought to bear against Superman, the only thing that persists is a pervasive sense of disruptivity. Diegetically, while different narratives feature different settings, threat, villains, allies, damsels, and so on, as well as varying aesthetic approaches to these narratological features, they all ultimately affirm an intrinsic

truth about this character. While everything about it may change, its power, body, and Otherness remain.

UNKNOWABILITY, ONTO-EXISTENTIAL, AND ACTION COMICS No. 1

Being that the character is, as Kal-El, Clark Kent, and Superman, an onto-existential multiplicity, I argue that the character is always-already elsewhere in an onto-existential sense: its being always-already troubles the anthropocentric aspects of its appearance. To show this, I will analyse the concept of speed in *Action Comics* No. 1, referring to Grant Morrison's analysis of this text, to argue that the speed of the action in *Action* No. 1 has more than just narratological consequences. It also problematizes the existential categories of identity and telos with regard to Superman. I will demonstrate how this phenomena is exemplified in the character's debut on the cover of *Action Comics* No. 1. This cover presents a depiction of power that disrupts, defers and breaks through all attempts at establishing an essential, totalizing signification, a symbol or series of symbols to completely represent the fundamentally alien power of its Otherness within the diegetic context of the world the narrative establishes.

If one considers the cover of *Action* No. 1 (see Figure. xxii. below), one notices that there are no nationalistic symbols or palpable political signifiers to identify the depicted figure as for or against any ideology of any kind. The

ambiguity of the figures in both the background and foreground, their socio-economic class and/or moral alignments further compound the indeterminateness of the depicted figure's basic narrative, affiliations (if any at all), and its basic *raison d'être*.

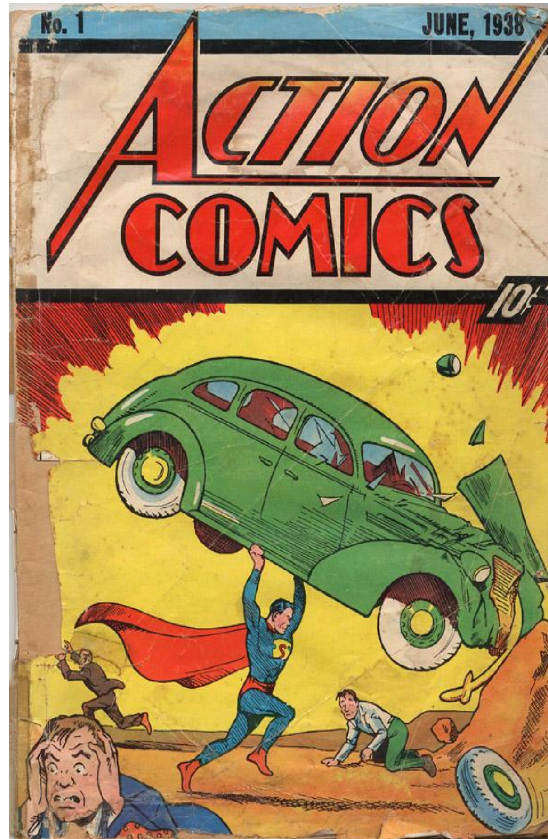


Fig. xxii. taken from *Action Comics* No. 1 (1938) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Joe Shuster. Cover.

The focus of Shuster's composition is entirely on this being, which simultaneously raises and refuses to answer the mystery of who or what it is, or why it is doing what it is doing. What is apparent is the power of this creature, moving from left to right through the image's equator, leaving a wake of destruction and hysterical Munciean dread that cannot be totally silenced by the

muteness of the medium. It looks like a man, with black hair on a head with all the familiar features on a body that is uncannily similar to that of a robust human man. It wears a form-fitting blue and red costume where an escutcheon rests on its chest within which sits a lonely yet proud “S”, a red charge on an undivided aureate field. The use of heraldic terminology here is meant to draw attention to how little the reader actually knows about the destructive figure depicted at this point. While later in its mythos, it becomes clear that there is a degree of synchronicity between the use and meaning of Kryptonian and terrestrial heraldic devices, in the scene of its debut, the meaning of its arms, its parentage, house, and purpose remain inconclusive. This sense of mystery permeating its spectacular display of power further compounds the sensationalism of what it is doing, weightlessly lifting a green vehicle above its head, on its toes, as if it were about to take flight despite the weight.

The image is ambiguous due to its lack of narratological context. As Morrison points out, “the cover image is a snapshot from the climax of the story [the reader] is yet to see”, thus creating an effect where “by the time the world catches up to Superman, [it is] concluding an adventure [the reader has] already missed” (Morrison 8). Expanding on Morrison's insight, the character has, in this sense, always-already outrun itself as well as the reader's understanding of it. While the cover of the comic book primarily depicts an entity of power, it also suggests that said figure is also a creature of speed. This combination of power and speed breaks through and disrupts narratological stability whereby the

fundamental aspects of a sequential narrative are undermined while, paradoxically, being presented in sequential form. This innovative storytelling technique creates an atmosphere of charged kinematics in which progression and regression occur simultaneously. In terms of being, and the staticity reductive definitions of being rely on, the absolutist claim to an inextricable link between Superman and moral ideology or nationalistic symbolism is effectively outrun by what is actually depicted. *Action* No. 1 suggests that the only absolutism that can be reliably referred to regarding the character is the supremacy of the Othering power of its body. Compared to the relationship between Superman and its power, other considerations become increasingly superfluous as this aspect of the character, encoded in the aesthetics of both cover and subsequent text, though narratologically fragmented, is still nevertheless visually succinct. This is noteworthy because the cover of *Action* No. 1 already depicts a mode of being that intimates an independence from nationalism or moral ideology, a force of greater significance in relation to the character's being, namely both its Otherness, and the power thereof.

From the cover, "a freeze-frame of frantic action," up until Superman transforms into Clark Kent, "Superman is in constant motion" (Morrison 8). Siegel abandons conventional linear story setups of typical action stories of the period in favour of a more startling, dislocated narratological style. For example, the first panel of the narrative does not labour itself with an explication of the intricacies of moral, ideological, or nationalistic categorizations of the character

as a means of apprehending or endorsing its actions. Rather, the action proceeds from the exiguous reasoning that “early Clark decided he must turn his titanic strength into channels that would benefit mankind,” leaving out fundamental questions such as “why?”, “under whose authority or prompting?”, “in what theatre or sphere?”, “to what degree?”, and “in what ways, exactly?” in a way that foregrounds the actions of the figure in question (Siegel 1; Morrison 8). This palpable sense of propulsion, speed, and power that presents itself both visually and linguistically. This is immediately apparent as, by the tenth panel, the pace of the narrative in which the reader’s attempts to follow Superman continues to accelerate, represented by the caption box of page two that reads, “[a] tireless figure races thru the night seconds count...delay means forfeit of an innocent life” (Siegel 2). The errors of spelling and punctuation suggest that Superman is propelling through the narrative, from panel to panel, at a speed greater than the speed required to document its movement, the speed of language to record it, and the speed of thought to comprehend it. It is as if both the reader and the writer are attempting to, but just barely, keep apace with Superman and the unidentified gagged and bound blonde woman under its arm. At this point in the narrative, the ‘S’ on its chest, whose shape is also shown to mutate, could signify anything from Saviour, Subverter, Survivor, to Subject. This relationship between the character’s onto-existential instability and time is similarly, albeit aphoristically, expressed in Steven T. Seagle’s *It’s a Bird...* (2004), where Seagle contemplates the ‘S’, stating:

“S’: Consider the “S.” Serpent swirl of the alphabet set. More so than any other Roman letter...the “S” wields surprising powers. Like the ability to plural. It can make a “word” into “words.” Turn an isolated tragedy...into an epidemic. Multiply a symbol into symbols at the drop of a consonant. The “S” can also possess. Take what it wants through association. It can turn “Father Time”...into “Father’s Time.” A single letter that can literally steal time. Making many out of one. Owning what it touches.” (Seagle 104)

This combination of speed and power points to one conclusion: the adopted morals and ethics of this so-called protector are already surpassed by something more elemental to it namely, the power of its body. In *Action* No. 1, the character is introduced as a being whose nature, power, actions, and motive have outrun the reader's comprehension (Morrison 8).

The image-text experience of *Action* No. 1 evokes a sense of being privy to an aesthetic loop whereby the real-time visualization and comprehension of the character's actions lay beyond the ability of human faculties. In terms of an ontological reading of Superman, *Action* No. 1 presents problems that include the highly theoretical consideration of whether the human beings of the DC Multiverse are or have ever been able to not only apprehend, but experience Superman in any kind of total way. Moreover, because of its power, the fact that Superman is able to manipulate diegetic space-time suggests that time and space cannot be relied on as absolute grounds for experiencing or encountering

Superman. However, within the context of *Action* No. 1, there simply is no time to consider these and other complex physical and philosophical questions which are, paradoxically, both evoked and deferred by the narrative and aesthetics of the comic itself. The reader is, keep in mind, attempting to catch up to the cover, to comprehend the who, what, where, how, and why of the figure depicted before the narrative commences, but narratologically after the narrative has already concluded.

By the eleventh panel on page two, Superman arrives at the Governor's estate. There is no internal monologue, no thought bubbles, nor speech balloons to suggest any verbal or thought exchanges between either Superman and itself, Superman and the bound and gagged blonde woman whom it is carrying and the reader, or Superman with the reader. The overall sense of ambiguity is maintained by the speed at which the narrative simultaneously progresses and regresses. At this early point of tension in the narrative's action, the reader cannot conclusively declare why Superman is doing what it is doing, where it is doing what it is doing, to or for whom it is doing what it is doing, when it is doing what it is doing, or, according the basic laws of extradiegetic physics, how it is doing what it is doing. In addition, it is not clear whether Superman is saving or abducting the aforementioned woman. As such, the stability and staticity required to know Superman are constantly deferred, disrupted, and delayed by the character's being, of which speed and power are essential aspects. Interestingly however, the cover of *Action* No. 1 is the climax of the

story and depicts the climactic event, which appears on the last page, on the cover, simultaneously before and after the story has transpired (see Figure xxiii. below). This sense of temporal and narratological volatility is what makes *Action* No. 1 such a brilliant debut for this being whose onto-existential movement and flux would later ossify into a modern archetype, a genre, and a modern folklore figure because it emphasizes an easily overlooked but nevertheless vital fact: both the character's thematic and aesthetic origin is essentially unstable.



Fig. xxii. taken from *Action Comics* No. 1 (1938) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Joe Shuster. p.g. 12.

Vis-à-vis *Action* No. 1, the reader is essentially experiencing the residue of Superman's actions, as if Siegel and Shusters' aesthetics had created a new form of long-exposure photography for superbeings (Morrison 8). Through the blurred lines of a being that is constantly in motion in onto-existential terms something essential remains. The only constant in the incomplete equation of the reader's disjointed comprehension of the character is the potency of Superman's speed and power. This irreducible aspect of the character's being is disruptive because it always-already produces complex and problematic barriers for developing an understanding of what Superman is whereby "[always-] already [the reader is] compelled through the narrative at [a simulacrum] of Superman's speed and required to focus on the most significant, most intense elements of every scene as if with [mock] supersenses" (Morrison 8). Since the narrative at the point of the cover of *Action* No. 1 is technically already over, the reader would indeed require supersenses to apprehend Superman's actions, as well as super faculties of comprehension to understand it in real-time. As a result, "the only solution is to be swept up in the high-velocity slipstream of [its] streaming red cape, one breathless step behind [it]" (Morrison 8).

To be clear, I do not propose that the sense of temporal and existential fracture in Superman is indicative of a diminishment of power but rather is a direct result thereof. It is precisely because the character's power persists despite the fractured nature of anything originary about it, its identities, extra-terrestrial and terrestrial alike, its home planet, and the distance it always-

already experiences from its host planet that the pervasiveness of its disequilibrium functions. Ultimately, Superman illustrates that power does not necessarily require a consistent or stable origin, particularly in terms of a rigid understanding or structuring of identity, for it to exert itself and disrupt any and all pre-existing conditions of being and the phenomena in which it emerges. In this way, *Action* No. 1 innovatively suggests that it is not a question of where or why power comes from with Superman. Rather, it is a question of where it will be and why it will be there.

SUPERMAN'S DIEGETIC TERRESTRIAL EXPERIENCE

Freitas Jr.'s text details a range of various xenological concepts that speculate on the nature of alien life. These include: general and comparative planetology, the definitions and origins of life, exotic biochemistries, alien bioenergetics, extra-terrestrial biomechanics, alien sex, alien senses, extra-terrestrial intelligence, extra-terrestrial energy and culture, xenobiotechnology, interstellar voyaging, alien weapons, planetary engineering and galactic high technology, xenosociology, extra-terrestrial governments, extra-terrestrial cultures, theory and practice of First Contact, and First Contact and the Human Response. I will now focus on four of the named xenological interests, namely xenopsychology, xenointelligence, xenoweaponry and the theory and practice of First Contact, to provide an xenological outline of Superman's Otherness as the

character experiences it on a diegetic earth.

The nature of any xenological profile of Superman will ultimately be comparative. Such speculation will assess what the character is able to do, referring to terran physiology, psychology, sociology, morality, and ethics, in comparison to both diegetic and extradiegetic human faculties. As such, the character's powers and abilities need to be contextualized. Superman's powers have undergone numerous stages of revision, sometimes total, which involve the increase and decrease of the power of the character's body throughout its publication history. Examples include: John Byrne's 1986 *Man of Steel*; Mark Waid and Leinil Francis Yu's 2002 *Superman: Birthright*, in which Superman acquires a new power by allowing it to see the 'aura' of all living things, described as 'soul-vision'; Geoff Johns and Gary Frank's 2009 *Superman: Secret Origins*, in which Superman is able to fly even in its 'adolescence'; and Grant Morrison and Rags Morales' 2011 *Action Comics* run, in which Superman is able to emit various types of radiation, including microwaves.

That said, in *The Science of Superman* (2002) Mark Wolverton outlines a core portfolio of diegetic abilities produced by Superman's body which remain consistent with the character: invulnerability, flight, superstrength, superspeed, superhearing, and supervision. Having their most extreme expressions in the 1970s and 1990s, these abilities have various subsequent attributes, manifestations, and combinations which range from superhuman to transcendent or godlike. These include: titanic strength, allowing Superman to

physically move planets and other massive celestial bodies from their respective orbits; unaided flight; superspeed (sub and faster-than-light speed). As a result of this particular ability, the character's cognition, reflexes, and perceptions are also subluminal or faster-than-light, meaning that Superman possesses what would appear to be pre-cognitive abilities relative to a diegetic human being; invulnerability, allowing Superman to withstand all types of radiation save that of kryptonite or a red star; a healing factor which allows Superman to regenerate faster than human beings (and faster still depending on the amount of yellow radiation it is exposed to), as well as immunity from all forms of diegetic terrestrial illness, disease, toxins or viruses; supervision, including X-Ray, heat-vision, telescopic, and microscopic vision. This allows the character to see across interstellar distances, as well as observe phenomena occurring microscopically and sub-atomically. This kind of seeing allows Superman to observe the entire electromagnetic spectrum and beyond; superhearing, allowing Superman to distinguish specific frequencies from a cacophony, making it able to identify distresses, human or natural, at any time, anywhere on a diegetic earth; superbreath, allowing Superman to inhale and exhale large quantities of air at great pressures and speeds, allowing it to freeze objects with its breath. It is also able to hold its breath for extended periods of time, allowing it to operate in airless environments, underwater and in space, for example; supercognition and superintelligence, which afford Superman what extradiegetic and diegetic human beings would perceive as a genius-level intellect and such

faculties of mind as an eidetic memory, allowing it total recall of all the phenomena it encounters. Exposure to yellow radiation further intensifies this ability, allowing the character to process the vast amounts of data available to its senses in an intelligible manner; superolfaction, allowing Superman to detect smells precisely and at great distances. Among these primary flows of power is also an irresolvable negative condition namely, Superman's fatal toxicological reaction to kryptonite. Armed with these primary powers, the character has been depicted to perform extreme, godlike feats which often employ an apocalyptic aesthetic to express the magnitude of the disruptivity of its power and Otherness throughout its publication history. Consider the following examples:



Fig. xxiv. taken from *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 657 (December, 2006) "City Of Tomorrow" written by Kurt Busiek, illustrated by Carlos Pacheco.

In this post-*Crisis* story, Arion of Atlantis shows Superman and its comrades that if it were to be thrown at an earth at sufficient velocity, the impact of its body would cause a nuclear winter. The apocalyptic imagery is clear in that Arion equates character's body with a nuclear device. Inherent in this conceptualization is the idea that Superman's body and the power it commands, like a nuclear device, contains the dualistic tension of preventative protection and apocalyptic destruction. Notice how the character is not even depicted in

this splash page. The page's entire aesthetic space is dedicated to depicting the apocalyptic potential of its body and the power it commands. In this way, Carlos Pacheco's depiction of a Superman-caused nuclear winter presents the apocalyptic aspects of the character's power in both a spectacular and visually succinct manner. Symbolically, the image concretizes the idea that Superman's body, like a meteor, contains both gold and destruction.



Fig. xxv. taken from *Kingdom Come* Vol. 1, No. 4 "Never-Ending Battle" (August, 1996) written by Mark Waid, illustrated by Alex Ross. p.g. 188.

The connection between the destructive potential of Superman's body, nuclear power, and apocalyptic symbolism is echoed in the above image. Ross's photorealistic watercolour technique gives a powerful rendering of a simple yet awful fact: the character's body and the power it commands surpasses nuclear destructive power. In this post-*Crisis* Elseworlds story, the U.N. of Earth-22 decide to use a nuclear bomb to destroy that world's superheroes who are all conveniently gathered in the same location and distracted by fighting one another. After the intercession of that world's Billy Batson/Shazam, who intercepts the bomb and destroys it, sacrificing himself in the process, Superman is the only combatant on the ground left alive. Ross depicts Superman in the exact centre of the full-page splash, surrounded by the petrified skeletal remains of both its foes and allies. Ross's depiction is particularly powerful because the fallen are comprised of both mortal human beings and superbeings. These are individuals of power whose power could not withstand a thermonuclear blast. In the ashen epicentre, the reader sees that not even Superman's uniform (barring its cape) is grossly tattered. Ross's work spectacularly presents not only the apocalyptic themes of the story, but wordlessly underscores the fact that in the face of the greatest power human beings have harnessed and weaponized, Superman remains indestructible.

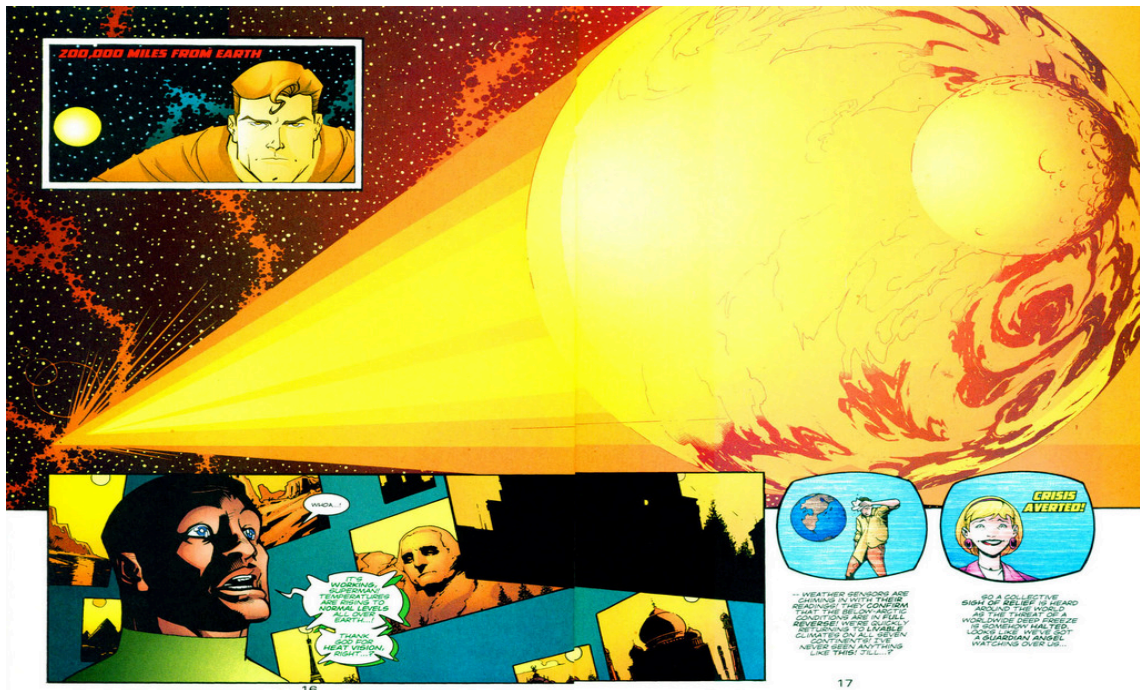


Fig. xxvi. taken from *Adventures of Superman* Vol. 1, No. 620 (November, 2003) "Martyr Party People" written by Joe Casey, illustrated by Derec Aucoin. p.g. 17.

The tendency of allowing Superman's displays of apocalyptic power their most resonance through aesthetic choices like single or double-page splashes can also be noted in the above example. In this post-Crisis story, Superman combats a celestial entity called the Cannibal Planet. The Cannibal Planet approaches that earth's sun, causing the rapid loss of solar energy and thus, the subsequent cooling of that earth. After defeating the Cannibal Planet near the sun, Superman fires its heat-vision toward the earth from two-hundred thousand miles away, raising global temperatures back to 'normal' levels. Like Pacheco and Ross, Derec Aucoin's use of the aesthetic space relinquishes depictions of a familiar, smiling, and benevolent Superman thereby foregrounding the character's spectacular power. This is further emphasized by the fact that

Aucoin does not use familiar symbols associated with the character to offer any kind of succour in view of the power actually depicted. Both pages are entirely dedicated to show the awesome climatological effects only one part of the character's body can produce, namely its eyes. In this way, Aucoin's depiction of the effects of the character's heat-vision suggest that Superman's powers rival those of a sun, leading the reader to consider the notion that natural solar power is made redundant by the power of Superman's body. In addition, Aucoin's depiction of Superman's power is, on the one hand, elemental and, on the other, totemic in that it turns the somewhat tepid-sounding 'heat-vision' into a symbolic representation of the character as a helial deity.

In the post-*Crisis* story *JLA: Our Worlds At War* No. 1 (September, 2001), the Justice League fight against Imperiox Probes – smaller duplicates of the otherwise colossal Imperiox-Prime, who is the embodiment of entropy and as such, takes the form of pure energy contained within a colossal humanoid suit of armour. Since the beginning of time in the DC multiverse, Imperiox-Prime has repeatedly destroyed the universe, creating a new one from the rubble of the old. In this story however, after Aquaman confronts one of the Imperiox Probes near Atlantis and is seemingly destroyed in the resultant explosion, Superman parts the sea with its heat-vision in a fit of rage, declaring war against Imperiox. Consider the following image.



Fig. xxvii. taken from *JLA: Our Worlds At War* Vol. 1, No. 1 (September, 2001)
"A Date Which Will Live In Infamy" written by Jeph Loeb, illustrated by Ron Garney.

Ron Garney's depiction of a wrathful Superman invites deistic considerations of a Judeo-Christian nature. Not only is Superman literally parting a red sea irradiated by the intensity of its heat-vision, but this image also calls to mind The Crossing of the Red Sea in the Book of Exodus 13:17 and 14: 29. While in the Biblical story, Moses was an instrument of the divine will to assist the Israelites escape their Egyptian pursuers, the nature and tone of this Biblical imagery is

inverted in Garney's usage. Garney shows the character using its power not in a preventative or restorative manner, but, like the artists of the above examples, dedicates the entire page to illustrating the devastating power of Superman's wrath. In essence, Garney inverts Aucoin's depiction of Superman's heat-vision as a salve by showing that Superman's eyes are also an outlet of a rage of Biblical proportions.



Fig. xxviii. taken from *JLA* Vol. 1, No. 77 (March, 2003) "Stardust Memories" written by Rick Veitch, illustrated by Darryl Banks. p.g. 10.

Apocalyptic depictions of the character's power are not limited to the imagery of extinction level events or apocalyptic Biblical iconography. Consider the above image. In this post-Crisis story, a synthetic alien life form called Mnemon steals the Justice Leaguers' memories. This life-form is contained within a device at whose centre is a black hole no larger than a mote of dust, and the League member Atom, who had previously shrunk and entered the device to investigate it. Wonder Woman and Firestorm, having lost their memory of who Superman is, begin attacking it, mistaking it for a foe. Atom eventually manages to escape the device and Superman destroys it with its heat-vision. This leaves the black hole it contained exposed, leaving Superman to contain it by holding it in its fist before it can be disposed of in deep space with the help of Green Lantern. Having the character palm a black hole, regardless of size or duration for which it is 'held' places its power well beyond the most speculative theoretical terrestrial astrophysics. The fact that extradiegetic black holes, regions of space-time from which the force of gravity prevents anything, including light, from escaping, presents two types of disruptivity (Waid 299-300). Extradiegetically, black holes produce a phenomena known as the gravitational lensing effect, by which a black hole produces distortions of space-time so that the light between a distant cluster of galaxies and a terrestrial observer for example, would be warped as it travels toward said observer. Diegetically, Banks imitates this effect in the second panel, by warping the entire structure of

the panel itself and everything depicted in it – from the figures of Batman and Superman, to the background scene, to the light within the panel itself. The disruptivity of the black hole is, in turn, disrupted by the disruptivity of Superman's power. The fact that the character is able to 'hold' the black hole is symbolic of the inestimable corrective abilities of its body, which is shown to literally be able to not only formally correct or straighten the frame of the panel, but also symbolically, the nature of the world it contains as well.



Fig. xxix. taken from *DC Presents* No. 29 (January, 1981) "Where No Superman Has Gone Before" written by Len Wein, illustrated by Jim Starlin. p.g. 5.

The aesthetic treatment of Superman's power as a disruption of space-time is reiterated in the above image. In this pre-Crisis story, Superman chases after its cousin Supergirl who, unconscious, is travelling toward the Afterworld. In so doing, Superman violates both space and time and every barrier it had ever previously encountered. Jim Starlin's depiction of Superman's aptitude for aesthetic, philosophical, and chronotopal transgression is largely symbolic. He achieves this by turning the symbol of infinity into a representation of the reality of a universe. This involves interpretively rendering of the idea of a multiverse into an arrangement of luminous clusters that appear both inside and out of the black space of the known and the negative white space of the unknown which serves to divide the page. Diegetically, Starlin portrays the character's power as being absolutely transgressive in the sense that the image shows that a Kryptonian, under the power of its body alone, is able to permeate all boundaries, including those separating diegetic realities themselves.

Some of the most enduring images of Superman's display of raw physical power being used to overcome seemingly intractable obstacles employ the leitmotif of the character breaking free of chains – steel or kryptonite. This can be noted in *Superman* No. 11 (1940), *Superman* No. 135 (1960), *Superman* No. 233 (1971), *Superman* No. 120 (1997), and *Superman* No. 200 (2004), for example. In addition, depictions of Superman's power have also used the convention of illustrating the efficacy of said power by pitting it against

mechanical forces throughout the character's publication history: from depictions of Superman destroying cars, ships, firearms, factories, and trains in *Action Comics* No. 1-10, to anthropic machines as seen in the second episode of the iconic Fleischer Studios Superman cartoon titled "The Mechanical Monsters" (November, 1941). I argue that this particular motif has provided artists a way of aesthetically depicting the idea that the character's power is beyond both the physical and intellectual capabilities of diegetic human being and its creations. Such renderings of the feats of Superman's power illustrate that the character's body cannot be tamed by human contraptions, and that the typical binary of man contra machine is totally outmoded when compared to the power of Superman's body. Consider the following example taken from *Superman* No. 13 (December, 2012).

Fig. xxx. taken from *Superman* Vol. 3, No. 13 (December, 2012) written by Scott Lobdell, illustrated by Kenneth Rocafort.



In this story from the current New 52 continuity, Superman tests the limits of its strength against large and sophisticated machinery in an advanced secret science facility called the Block, located somewhere near that earth's core. It is the only place on this diegetic earth where Superman can safely, that is non-disruptively, train using equipment designed by the omniologist Dr. Veritas, Superman's friend and ally. The above panel reveals that the character has been essentially bench pressing 5.972 sextillion metric tons – the weight of the extradiegetic planet Earth – for five days without respite. Superman states that it finds the entire experience of testing its power to be liberating, being only very mildly exhausted. Symbolically, this example underscores the fact that 'the weight of the world' is no match for Superman's strength. An almost identical, albeit simplified, aesthetic is used by Frank Quitely in *All-Star Superman* No. 1 “Faster” (2011) to illustrate the same idea. In Morrison's story of a dying Superman, whose powers have been tripled by an ultimately 'lethal' over-saturation of solar radiation in its cells, Dr. Leo Quintum sets up a similar experiment in which Superman pushes against a mechanical device calibrated to measure the output tonnage of its physical strength. As Superman pushes against the device with its left arm alone, Quintum informs Superman that it is “pushing against the equivalent of 200 QUINTILLION tons” and that the experiment fails to reveal an “UPPER LIMIT” of the character's strength (Morrison 20). The figures in both examples may seem fatuous, however they gesture to the same underlying idea regarding the scale of Superman's body as

a physical manifestation of limitless power.

The idea of the character as limitless power is best exemplified by Superman Prime in *DC: One Million* No. 1-4 (November, 1998). In this post-Crisis story set in the eight hundred fifty third century of DC's main continuity, the original Superman (Kal-El or Superman Prime) still lives. However, it has existed in self-imposed exile in its Fortress of Solitude for fifteen thousand years, then situated at the centre of that sun. As a mystical, that is unexplained, result, Superman Prime transcends the limitations of the Universal, able to transgress otherwise insuperable diegetic laws and structures of continuity including space, time, and The Source Wall – a barrier on the edge of the known universe, beyond which exists what can be described as a diegetic cosmic force, essence, or being called the Source. The Source appears differently to every mortal, metahuman, or extra-terrestrial that encounters it. Only Barry Allen (The Flash), The Spectre, Metron, Darkseid, Lucifer Morningstar, and Superman Prime have breached the Source Wall. More impressively still, Superman Prime is the only being in the DC multiverse to study directly under the Source and as such, the skills, wisdom, or parts of the Source itself it absorbed underscore the idea that Superman's power is potentially limitless.

There are other notable examples of Superman expressing transcendent, that is the idea of limitless power, in a variety of degrees. These include:

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns written and illustrated by Frank Miller (June 1986) in which Superman diverts a specially designed Russian nuclear warhead

to detonate in a desert. The detonation results in an electromagnetic pulse that disables all electronics in the United States and results in climatological conditions resembling a nuclear winter. With its source of energy disrupted, Superman is depicted to shrivel to a skeletal form. Superman subsequently replenishes its energy by draining the stored solar radiation in some nearby plant life, leaving the plants themselves dead.

In *JLA* Vol. 2, No. 30 (April, 2009) written by Dwayne McDuffie, illustrated by Jose Luis, Superman is shown to accelerate to just under the speed of light, but is said by Batman to be able to surpass it. Superman does so in order to launch itself into a Shadow Moon created by Shadow Thief and Starbreaker at subluminal velocity in order to disintegrate it. In *Superman: Red Son* (2003) "Red Son Setting" written by Mark Millar, illustrated by Dave Johnson and Kilian Plunkett (August 2003), the singularities that are depicted to power Brainiac's ship threaten to explode. Brainiac's power core, when armed, is described as having a lethal blast radius of fifteen million miles. Superman has five seconds to remove the device to a safe distance. It succeeds, meaning that in order to do so, it would have to be traveling at approximately 27xC or 27 times the speed of light.



Fig. xxxi. taken from DC: One Million No. 4 "Death Star" (November, 1998) written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Val Semeiks.

Looking at Figure xxxi., one notes that Val Semeiks, like Carlin, elects a symbolic approach to the problem of representing the concept of Superman as a being of unlimited power. Semeiks's depiction of the aureate Superman after its

fifteen-thousand-year solar sojourn suggests that character's entire nature, including its power, has been alchemized in the crucible of that sun so that all the limits of the anthropic, save its form, have been transmuted into something wholly Other, powerfully irrepressible, and spatiotemporally uncontainable. The symbolic association with the alchemical process of transmuting base metals such as lead into gold finds particular resonance here if one considers the fact that the alchemical symbol for gold is a circle with a dot in its centre, which is also the astrological and ancient Chinese character for the sun. Semeiks's depiction of Superman and Morrison's theme of the deification of the character can be read as a direct reflection of these ancient symbols; the alchemical circle representing the sun, and Superman the dot at its centre.

Semeiks's depiction also evokes other cultural associations beyond the wide-spread tradition of gold being regarded as a precious or valuable substance. These include the Golden Fleece, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and perhaps most directly, the Book of Revelations 21: 21's description of the city of New Jerusalem as being paved with pure gold. In this sense, the combination of Morrison and Semeiks' depiction and portrayal of Superman suggests that by the eight hundred fifty third century, the substance of the character's body will become not only a radiant incarnation of power itself, but the raw material of heaven, or a fundamental element in the creation of perfection in a diegetic utopia. This perfection also gestures to the concept of immortality. In *All-Star Superman* (2005), Morrison and Frank Quitely show the

character not only being able to expand its bioelectric field to encompass and protect other objects or beings, but also that this field counteracts 'aging', increasing in strength as Superman grows 'older' to such a degree that, providing it has an uninterrupted source of yellow radiation, it is potentially immortal (Morrison 14). These themes of time, power, and perfection can be noted in another recurring motif used to portray Superman's power. Writer Alvin Schwartz describes it best in *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 115 (December, 1947): "incalculable tons of pressure exerted by the Man of Steel's mighty fist duplicate the work of eons to fuse the opaque coal carbons into the translucent perfection of a glittering diamond!" (Schwartz 1947).

The above examples of the potential disruptivity of the character's body are meant to illustrate the idea that the character is a diegetic symbol of life, or at least the human understanding thereof, being pushed to and beyond its limits. Inherent in its ability to act and the purview and efficacy of its actions is the idea that Superman must be thought of as nothing less than a being that escapes the diegetic representation of the limits of human systems of equivalence and, as such, disrupts their descriptive and onto-existential authority. Simultaneously however, the limits of human being Superman's power, body, and Otherness are able to disrupt are deeply uncanny because they are transgressed by a being that ostensibly looks human. Considerations of what Superman's power, body, and Otherness signify in terms of the future of a diegetic earth and its human race, and the inherent dystopian and utopian potentials therein, is necessitated

by the inescapably disruptive presence and abilities of a being that has been shown to squeeze coal into diamonds, fling planets through space, or cause a small earthquake with the clap of its hands, as it does in *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 115 (December, 1947) and *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 110 (July, 1947) respectively. In view of the affective range of Superman's power illustrated by these and countless other examples, it is clear that the classic description of the power and speed of Superman's body as more powerful than a locomotive and faster than a speeding bullet are outdated understatements. The above examples show that regardless of era, artist, or writer, the zenith of the character's diegetic power is as yet undefined. More importantly, however, is the idea that all these various depictions of Superman's power gesture to: a powerful mode of being that does not require the application of any external technology of power to produce and reproduce it. The apocalyptic and transgressive aesthetic of these images reiterates the idea that Superman's diegetic condition is one of potentially irresolvable disruptivity. They ultimately suggest that the potential disruptivity of the character's power, body, and Otherness is so extreme that, like an apocalypse, it polarizes the way in which it is understood. Taken to its radical conclusions, Superman's power either represents an opportunity for a utopian moment through which new modes of being may emerge, or the guarantee of a dystopian end to all being on a diegetic earth.

XENOINTELLIGENCE AND THE SUPERBRAIN

With the character's abilities and their disruptive potentials outlined, I will contextualize them within the aforementioned xenological frames, parsing them through the speculative concepts to explore the tensions the character's power and Otherness illicit within the remit of a diegetic earth. Xenointelligence refers to the manner in which aliens would hypothetically process and organize data received from their senses. In speculating on the possible forms and processes of xenointelligence, Freitas Jr. refers to Roger A. MacGowan, an aerospace computer scientist formerly at the Redstone Arsenal in Alabama, for a model of intelligence. According to MacGowan, the key to hypothetical alien intelligence alien lies in data processing. MacGowan identifies five criteria necessary and sufficient to specify intellectual functioning in any life-form in the universe. They are: 1) input – referring to the idea that an “an organism must be capable of reacting to physical events occurring in its environment. If it has no sensory input, it has no information to process and thus cannot think”; 2) storage – which refers to memory and recall. According to MacGowan, “without the ability to remember, a creature could not learn. All data processing would have to proceed in real time, with full throughput and no delays. Such a being would perceive no past or future, merely an ever-present now. Since the primary function of life is to accumulate information and structure, it is hard to see how a creature without memory could possess an adaptive and useful intellect without

recollection of the past”; 3) deduction – which refers to an alien being's ability to compare and contrast the various phenomena it encounters. As such, deduction, in a xenological context, refers to

“the ability to compare current input information patterns with stored information patterns is a crucial intellectual function. By making such an association, the creature becomes able to respond to the present on the basis of its past. The ability to use the generalizations formulated yesterday to respond to the problems of today is of great selective value in the struggle for survival”

4) induction – which refers to another function of memory. According to MacGowan, “inductive thinking must be considered a prerequisite for thinking, because it provides a means of altering stored information patterns as a function of each input information pattern in such a way as to form or modify generalizations on the basis of experience. With induction, an organism is able to respond to its future on the basis of its past”; 5) output – which refers to the subsequent actions an alien being will pursue based on the previous four aspects of its intelligence. In other words, “after it has decided what to do, an intelligent being must act. This output may manifest itself either as physical or mental activity” (McGowan qtd. in Freitas Jr. 2008).

Using McGowan’s framework, how is one to xenologically construe Superman's xenointelligence? According to the examples analysed above, it would seem that the character has little to nothing superior to offer in terms of

human conceptions of intelligence. Based on the above examples, at most, one could conclude that Superman has no intellectual nuance and is merely physically ballistic. That said, however, though the examples discussed above convey the idea of Superman's and, by extension, Kryptonian physical power on a diegetic earth as being comparatively infinite (when compared to human psycho-physical capabilities) through an apocalyptic aesthetic, or the aesthetic of Superman overcoming mechanical forces, there are subtler ways in which Superman's power is displayed. Keep in mind that diegetically, the character 'thinks' through a "super-brain" and has since the 1940s. Typically, this attribute is shadowed by more iconic powers, flight being the obvious example. That said, consider the example of *Superman* Vol. 1 No. 655 "Camelot Falls" (October, 2006) written by Kurt Busiek, illustrated by Carlos Pacheco. In this post-*Crisis* story, Superman disguises entire works of non-fiction as minute punctuation marks in a novel, processing masses of disparate information concordantly. Following this logic, it stands to reason that the character could read every diegetic word in every diegetic language ever produced in the DC Multiverse. It could subsequently analyze this hard data, parsing all diegetic humankind's recorded attempts at cognition, reason, epistemology, science, religion, ontics, ethics, poetry, music and so on. After examining the sum total of human being as it has been set down in symbols, such a reading would contain an exhaustive catalogue of what it fears, loves, desires, thinks, and feels it has lost, gained, needs or never had.

The implication of the above example here is that such a work, from such a unique perspective, would necessarily change the way the diegetic humans of that earth would think of themselves, their histories, and the ways they understand their world and the universe. This example is important because it shows that the character could only change a world if it offers it something it could not absorb without self-destructing or fundamentally changing itself. While using its power to effect a physical apocalypse would certainly achieve a transvaluative end, the aforementioned hypothetical tome is another example of such an irrefutably radical offer. It suggests that a seemingly infinitesimal expenditure of the character's power would immediately create such excess and ambivalence that the circulation of pre-existing values and the principle of equivalence that governs them would completely collapse on that earth. In this way, power would act in both directions. The power of that earth's grand narratives would be played against the concept and oppressive power of grand narratives: the combination of Superman's nigh-omniscient and omni-historical perceptive powers and its ability to process and present the conclusions of its observations concerning the recorded history of human being on that earth would produce a radical tautology that would make human ideology's own logic the ultimate tool for its own revaluation. As such, my point here is that the character's power and Otherness can be both physically and cognitively disruptive.

THE ALIEN BODY AS XENOWEAPONRY

Regardless of the importance of any technological constituent – for example, the increased mechanization of human being endorsed by extropianists and transhumanists, or the total rustification of human being favoured by anarcho-primitivists, it is clear from the above examples that a Kryptonian on any diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-cultural, economic, and historical reality is potentially extremely, perhaps even totally, destructive and therefore dangerous. As such, speed, contention, motility, play, dynamism, and threat are concepts that are radicalized through the power of Superman's body. I also acknowledge that the apocalyptic levels the character's diegetic power have an undeniably sinister subtext. As a being of ostensibly limitless power, the character is always-already a threat to the idea of diegetic human striving, let alone continuation, because its body carries with it the potential for the total disabling of human will to power. Freitas Jr. states that xenological interest in xenoweaponry is a largely defensive concern; namely, that “turning our backs on the possibility of malevolent aliens will not make the problem go away. In dealing with extra-terrestrial intelligences, we must be prepared for both the best and the worst” (Freitas Jr. 2008).

The types of alien weaponry that could speculatively be brought to bear against humanity, according to xenological thinking, include lasers, "nukes," biological agents, psychological methods of warfare, energy absorber fields and

particle disintegrators. There are also examples of what Larry Niven calls 'soft weapons' in his short story "The Soft Weapon" (1967). Amongst other things, the text explores the possible outcomes if humanity were to discover an intelligent alien weapon (Freitas Jr. 2008). Freitas Jr. notes that

"science fiction authors are fond of pointing out, advanced ETs may have many motivations -- conquest among them and therefore, it is not enough to say that superior technology necessarily breeds benevolence, since superior technology here on Earth has often made it easier for humans to kill. But even if it turns out that most alien civilizations are benevolent, is it correct thinking to ignore the quite disturbing possibility that there may be a few warlike intelligences loose in the universe?" (Freitas Jr. 2008)

In DC Comics' publication history, texts like *Superman: Last Son* (2008) written by Geoff Johns and Richard Donner, illustrated by Adam Kubert, *Superman: New Krypton* (2008) written Geoff Johns, James Robinson, and Sterling gates, illustrated by Pete Woods and Keith Champagne, and *Superman: War of the Supermen* (2010) written by James Robinson and Sterling Gates, illustrated by Eddy Barrows and Jamal Igle present the notion of alien weapons that are technologically superior to humanity's arsenals, their threat and comprehension thereof, in terms of full-blown inter-planetary invasion. Throughout the Superman mythos, conflict between the humanities of DC's many earths against malevolent Kryptonians is always portrayed with the exigency of an extinction

level event, with or without the intercession of Superman on behalf of the humanity under threat.

While the above-mentioned forms of xenoweaponry may offer an alien species tactical and ordinance superiority in a military engagement with humanity or other extra-terrestrial species, Freitas Jr. refers to John W. Campbell, Jr.'s editorial in *Astounding Science* (1952) that explores the idea of "The Ultimate Weapon," that is an irresistible force for which no defence exists, by outlining the characteristics of the Ultimate Weapon. According to Campbell, the following eleven requirements that specify such a device are as follows: 1) it must absolutely wipe out all opposition; 2) it should be of such nature that no resistance to it is possible; 3) it must be such that the opposition cannot turn it against the original wielder; 4) it must annihilate all opposition, yet must not harm friends; 5) it should not damage any useful or constructive forces; 6) it should be of a catalytic nature, self-propagating, such that, once loosed, even the destruction of the original source cannot defeat it; 7) it will render all present weapons inoperative; 8) its power should be such that no power in the Universe can stand against it; 9) its effect should not depend on surprise, so that even pre-erected defences cannot defeat it; 10) it should cost very little to use; 11) the field where it has once been used should be permanently uninhabitable by the opposition, but freely accessible to friends." (Campbell qtd. in Freitas Jr. 2008).

Within the context of a diegetic earth in the DC Multiverse, an ostensibly malevolent Kryptonian force, comprised of a single individual or an army,

satisfies many of the above criteria for the Ultimate Weapon, Superman represents a refinement of the Ultimate Weapon as described by Campbell. If one thinks of the character, armed with no weapon but its own body, as a representation of a Kryptonian Ultimate Weapon, a brief comparison of Superman against Campbell's outline confirms the character's status as a potential Ultimate Weapon: 1) based on the character's quintessential abilities detailed above, it would be able to absolutely wipe out all opposition the humanity of an earth could set to challenge it; 2) due to its near omnipotent sensory array, the character's offensive capabilities represented by its heat-vision, super-breath, its physical invulnerability, and its super-brain, the Superman's martial superiority compared to the humanity of an earth is unquestionable; 3) while Superman has been shown to exhibit psycho-emotional stress whereby the character questions its place on an earth and its relationship to it and its living creatures, barring the use of magic (to which the character is susceptible), it is impossible to turn Superman against itself to the point of self-annihilation; 4) if the humanity of an entire earth were to declare open war on Superman, the character could destroy said opposition with the exception of what it would deem its friends and allies, most likely Lois Lane, Perry White, Martha Kent, and Jimmy Olsen, for example; 5) the character could annihilate all opposition on an earth without destroying the sun, which, to a superpowered Kryptonian on an earth, would be considered to be a constructive force; 6) while the original source of Superman-as-Ultimate Weapon would be the planet

Krypton, the character does not need Krypton to exist in order for it catalyse solar energy within its cells in order to self-propagate its powers; 7) based on the character's abilities mentioned above, it is clear that the power and Otherness of Superman's body renders diegetic humanity's martial aptitude redundant; 8) while there are diegetically active forces in the DC Multiverse that could trouble a superpowered Kryptonian campaign of war and conquest – Darkseid, Mongul, and Brainiac, for example – the character has been shown to consistently overcome said Universal forces, often singlehandedly, resulting in the idea that the character as an embodiment of indomitability, that overcoming any forces – regardless of the reason – including Universal ones, is a part of its legacy, its mythos, and its history; 9) while it would be simple enough for Superman to launch a surprise attack on humanity due to the fact that, as Clark Kent, it is hidden within the humanity of a given diegetic earth, were it to declare open war on a given diegetic humanity, allowing it time to erect defences, it would still be able to physically obliterate them; 10) being that Superman has unimpeded access to solar radiation, from a diegetic earth's yellow star or any other yellow star within the broad radius of its ability to reach,, the character does not require any source of energy that it would have to pay, beg, borrow, or steal; 11) should the character seek to destroy its enemies on a given earth, it could do so in a targeted, albeit apocalyptic manner, leaving enough spaces and resources unharmed for the benefit of its friends and allies.

My point with the above comparison between Campbell criteria and

Superman as a Kryptonian Ultimate Weapon is to preliminarily address the dystopian aspects of the character's power, body, and Otherness. By viewing it as a soft ultimate weapon in xenological terms, a camouflaged one, in many ways Superman is DC Comics' greatest ultimate weapon. As an idol of diegetic humanity who ostensibly practices strict moralism and onto-existential subterfuge, Superman does not have to destroy humanity outright, despite its monumental abilities. It simply has to use them to keep a diegetic humanity as it is and has been heretofore, using a rigid interpretation of human morality and ethics as a mandate to stop it from progressing. I believe this to be a latent aspect of the fact that Superman chooses to use its power, body, and Otherness within the strict confines of the activity of a superhero. As such, it dedicates its power, body, and Otherness, even their most radical expressions, to the protection and reproduction of a prevailing socio-politically normative program. It is an agent of Judeo-Christian morality and the abstractions of good and evil dialectically distilled, politicized, and enshrined in the diegetic representation of the extradiegetic American Constitution and its various repressive and ideological apparatuses. As a result, its power and the upper limits thereof are not, in so far as being employed paradoxically both for diegetic humanity, necessary and are, therefore, typically always-already held in reserve.

On the one hand, Superman's power is what separates it from human being in clear and spectacular ways. As the above examples indicate, the upper limits of its power could be described as ineffable, or even be said to possibly

resist symbolization in any logical or rational way, and perhaps may even start to appropriate ecumenical diction. But unlike Jesus Christ, whose 'presence' has been abstracted in the form of scripture and dogma, Superman is, diegetically speaking, radically physical and does not require faith to be substantiated in the hyperdiegesis of the DC Multiverse. Furthermore, unlike its inter-diegetic contemporaries such as Batman or Ironman, who suggest that the radical changing of the human body and therefore the physical and cognitive aptitude thereof can only be achieved technologically by automating the body, the character reminds readers of the importance of the physical. Not fascistically or anarcho-primitivistically, but as an important response to extropian and transhumanist themes that proliferate in modern comic book superhero narratives: that while transhumanist ideals of radical Otherness may or may not be attainable through technology, they can be attained through Otherness and and the unaltered body of the Other.

On the other hand, through example or through force, Superman's disruptivity represents the potential for the unification of being on a diegetic earth. As a tyrant, the character could superimpose its own model of being on an earth and use its vast abilities to enforce the maintenance and reproduction of such a mode of being. Simultaneously, as an example of the diegetic representation of being Other, the character also necessarily catalyses a revaluation of all values whereby diegetic humanity can decide to revalue itself in the face of Superman's disruptivity. In view of this socio-political, cultural and

existential paradox, the character is essentially disruptive and unsettling because the ambiguity of its potential can never be absolutely annulled. Its being inscribes and evokes a terror and excitement in the being of its diegetic hosts because the disruptivity of its power, body, and Otherness expresses a simultaneously beautiful and terrible possibility: the power to change a world.

XENOPSYCHOLOGY AND THE LATENT TRAUMA OF SUPERBEING

One of the most important, albeit elusive, aspects of xenological thinking pertains to xenopsychology. It is so important that, according to Freitas Jr., “knowledge of the fundamentals of alien psychology is a “must” in any first contact or culture contact situation” and, furthermore, that “no real comprehension of ET societies is possible without a thorough understanding of the differences between human and alien motivations, goals, and behavioural repertoires” (Freitas Jr. 2008). As outlined in Freitas Jr.’s text, the concept of xenopsychology is very broad, and encompasses issues including motives and drives, need hierarchies and goal-directed behaviour, personality and “ego” (or “selfness”), perception, subjective time, sleep, circadian rhythms and other natural bodily cycles, “instinct,” learning, habituation and conditioning, language, memory, emotions, altruism, and awareness, for example (Freitas Jr. 2008).

When considering the problem of Superman's xenopsychology, one cannot presume that its xenopsychology is not diegetically predicated on

processes, technologies, social systems, and materials from another world, and that said substances do not differ, or rather, produce different psychological effects, from human psychology. While the xenopsychological affects of being able to fly or bathe in supernovae are obvious examples of the difference between human and Kryptonian experience of the same phenomena on a diegetic earth, which therefore influence notions of feeling, thinking and attitude toward said phenomena, comparatively minor differences in sensory apparatus and basic mental equipment, such as being able to photosynthesize, could significantly alter the perception and thought processes of the character on a diegetic earth (Freitas Jr. 2008).

This difference in diegetic onto-existential experience between Kryptonians and humans of a diegetic earth necessarily recalls Freitas Jr.'s initial criterion for xenopsychology, namely motivation and sense of self. In "The Real Truth About Superman: And The Rest Of Us, Too," Mark Waid describes Superman as follows:

"Superman, the grandfather of all superheroes, is a cultural institution. Even the most elite and insulated intellectuals have been exposed to enough pop culture to be familiar with the Man of Steel and what he stands for. He fights a 'never-ending battle' for truth [and] for justice...Consequently, he is as close as contemporary Western culture has yet come to envisioning a champion who is the epitome of

unselfishness. The truest moral statement that can be made of Superman is that he invariably puts the needs of others first.” (Waid 3).

Waid challenges this essentially moral reading of Superman throughout his essay in an attempt to answer the question of what precisely are the character's motivations, why Superman does what it does within the context of its diegetic experience of the earths of DC's hyperdiegesis. I cannot holistically consider this question without considering what the character has been portrayed to want. What can a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality, a reality that has seen humanity dispense great beauty and even greater misery against itself, a reality in which “unrestrained capitalism always wins, where politicians always lie, where sports idols take drugs and beat their wives, and where white picket fences are suspect because they hide dark things” have to offer such a being? (Waid 6).

In Paul Dini and Alex Ross's *Superman: Peace on Earth* (1999), the reader is lead to believe that what Superman wants above all else is to be a catalytic agent, not an idol, but an example to spur diegetic humanity on to create beyond itself. In this story, after helping to officiate the beginning of the Christmas season celebrations in Metropolis, Superman encounters a starving girl. This inspires Superman to investigate the problem of world hunger. Before Superman can use its immense power to address this longstanding problem of human being, the character first declares its intentions to Congress and the United Nations. It proposes to go about this somewhat symbolically by

distributing as much grain and basic food stuffs to starving people all over the planet within a twenty-four-hour time frame. Its proposal is met with significant controversy and debate, but is ultimately approved. While preparing for the task, Superman states:

“I think back to my father. As a farmer, he had a natural understanding for the Earth. I remember him telling me this world is capable of providing for all its creatures. Even now, with so many people, there exists enough food for everyone. 'The problem.' Pa used to say, 'is people, as far back as we go, we've always had problems with sharing. Seems everyone's too busy holding on to what they've got to care how their neighbours are doing.' Pa said it would take a special individual with no personal agenda to make everyone realize what the world has to offer. Someone who could put his own needs aside to help the greater good. I don't pretend to think I am that person, though I have always tried to be there for others. To look upon my powers as a gift, not mine alone but for anyone who needs them. Over the years I've helped as many people as I could. It's not my place to dictate policy for humankind. But perhaps the sight of me fighting hunger on a global scale would inspire others to take action in their own ways. Its certainly an example worth setting” (Dini and Ross 1999).

However beautiful or, for some, naive one may find the character's utopian vision of humanity's potential, I argue that such a vision cannot nullify the truths

of human being Superman diegetically encounters and, being an agent of the media apparatus of the State, observes and reports on daily. The question at hand is concerned with Superman's value as such an example in the face of the continued suffering of the human race. As Waid puts it,

“how relevant is a man who flies and wear a red cape to kids who have to pass through metal detectors at school? How inspiration is an invulnerable alien to you people who are taught that the moral visionaries and inspirational figures of history – from Bobby Kennedy to Martin Luther King to Mohandas Gandhi – got the same reward for their efforts: a bullet and a burial? [As such, one] can't help but ask 'why?' [why would] this 'Man of Tomorrow' – a.k.a. Kal-El, the Last Son of the planet Krypton...ever consider embracing a path of selflessness? What possible reward could public service hold for a Superman who could, if he so desired, remain out of the public eye and media scrutiny? What would a full-time career of doing good for others offer a man who could, comfortable and safely cloaked in a T-Shirt and jeans, make a very good living by wringing a diamond out of a lump of coal? Or, to put it another way, this is a unique individual who could have anything he wanted for himself, so why does he spend nearly all his time taking care of others?”
(Waid 7)

If not material wealth or possessions, fame, or laurels of any kind, I am lead to ask what it is that a diegetic earth and its humanity could offer Superman that is

so tenacious, so precious that would encourage it to obsessively maintain its disruptive and problematical relationship to human beings, to maintain the relations of power that facilitate them, and to keep itself from using its power to decisively change that world. The answer Waid puts forward is predicated on Superman's superlative condition and the solipsistic sense of extreme isolation that results. Because of its power and Otherness, the character's condition is one of terminal displacement, permanent fracture, and a sustained existential crisis of self-understanding. According to Waid, the solution to this dilemma is belonging. But belonging is not so easily achieved, and may be impossible for a being like Superman on a diegetic earth, I argue. As such, within the context of a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality, for Superman, the question of belonging comes down to being or becoming: to belong versus to change. Does Superman have more of a desire to produce different, new modes of being than it does to belong to those that have existed on the diegetic earths it encounters heretofore?

XENOPSYCHOLOGY AND BELONGING

I argue that the conventional understanding of Superman paraphrased by Waid above holds that the three things Superman wants most are (in reverse order); 1) 'Truth', 'Justice', and peace for all humanity, 2) Lois Lane, and 3) to belong. Waid suggests that, above its desire to be a shining example for the

potential of a utopian Tomorrow on a diegetic earth, or even to be able to be wholly with Lois without the always-already present interruptions of its power (Superman) and Otherness (Kal-El), it is the third of these three desires that is strongest in the character. Setting aside the problems inherent in equivocating human psychology with extra-terrestrial xenopsychology, Waid sites Abraham Maslow in suggesting that, on a hierarchy of needs, just below various physiological needs, beginning with nourishment, is the psychological need to belong that is most powerful in human beings. In this way, hunger, the base need to survive, can be viewed as a primary condition of human being. It is a need that always recurs and can only, despite quantity or quality of food, be momentarily delayed. In *Peace on Earth*, Superman forgoes the Yuletide celebrations held at the offices of the Daily Planet. Instead, the character conducts research in the office archives into the problem of world hunger, its causes, effects and possible solutions. Interestingly, it declares, when examining disturbing photographs of malnourished, famine-ridden children and various other victims of hunger, that “it’s ironic. I don’t need to eat. I will never know HUNGER. I don’t know what victims of starvation feel. I can’t decide if that is a blessing or a curse” (Dini and Ross 1999). In this sense, the struggle of diegetic human being in the story has “virtually no significance to Kal-El, whose cellular structure derives its nourishment not from food but from solar energy” (Waid, 8). One can therefore extrapolate that due to its invulnerability, Superman cannot also truly understand the human need for safety, for shelter, for security. Such

concerns, drives, and instincts – fundamental to the condition of being human – mean less and less when you consider the fact that the character can withstand a direct thermonuclear detonation and other displays of power discussed above.

If its actions are not reducible to anthropic physiological or psychological needs, drives or instincts, Waid assumes that Superman's need to belong is the primary motivation for its actions and the essence of the strength of the bonds that join it with diegetic human being in its experience of a diegetic earth. It is perfectly logical to assume as Waid does because why else would Superman bother being Clark Kent, live a city life, or work at all? Why would it not decide to abandon a diegetic earth and its inhabitants and explore the vastness of space? Waid assumes that Kal-El connects with the world

“not by turning his back on his alien heritage, though that was certainly his instinct while he was growing up in a small town. No, he ultimately connects by embracing that heritage – by creating as an adult a new identity for himself that is as Kryptonian as Clark Kent is human. Kal-El knows instinctively that it is only when he puts his gifts to use that he truly feels alive and engaged. Only by acting to his fullest potential, rather than hiding on the sidelines behind a pair of fake eyeglasses, can he genuinely participate in the world around him. Only by being openly Kryptonian can he also be an Earthman with exuberance and excellence. When he lives as who he really is, in full authenticity to his nature and gifts, and then brings his distinctive strengths into the service of others,

he takes his rightful place in the larger community, in which he now genuinely belongs and can feel fulfilled.” (Waid 9)

For someone as intimately familiar with Superman as Mark Waid is, his diction betrays a Romantic blindness, a biased wish that certain unavoidable truths about the character's being, its power and its Otherness can be neatly and absolutely ameliorated. To his credit, Waid is sensitive to the fact that Superman is an inescapably paradoxical character. It is and has always been

“a shining example to readers everywhere of the virtue of selfless heroism – but he has accomplished this by acting in its own self interest...Yes, Superman aids those in peril because his natural instincts and his Midwestern upbringing drive him toward acts of morality – but along with that genuine altruism is a healthy amount of self-awareness and a surprisingly enviable ability on his part to balance his own internal needs with the needs of others in a way that most benefits everyone. In helping others, Superman helps himself. In helping himself, he helps others. When he comes to the aid of other people, he is exercising his distinctive powers and fulfilling his authentic destiny. That of course, benefits him. When it embraces his history and nature and launches out in the one set of activities that will most fulfil and satisfy him, he is helping others. There is no exclusive, blanket choice to be made between the needs of the individual and the needs of the larger community. There is no contradiction here between self and society. But it's a bit paradoxical in

a very inspirational way. Superman properly fulfils his own nature, and his identity, and the result is that many others are better off as well.” (Waid 9)

I've quoted Waid at length to respond to this kind of Romantic reading of Superman that negates the character's tragic and circuitous existence within a diegetic reality it has the power to change, but is ideologically forbidden to. The extreme implication of Waid's Romanticism is that Superman cannot save a diegetic earth because the character's need to belong to that earth as it recognizes it, as well as the pleasure it takes in it – with all its aporias, problems, and hunger for more, for better, for an alternative, for change, for power – outweighs the character's will to decisively use its power to change it. As such, the character's refusal not to can only be construed as a choice. It is a choice with moral and existential consequences that cannot be overlooked. The implication here is, as Jameson suggests, that “the alien, fully assimilated, its Difference transmuted into Identity, will simply become a capitalist like the rest of us” (Jameson 141).

The irony of its desire to belong is that its power and Otherness always-already disrupt its attainment of a whole human life as Clark Kent. Within the context of the diegetic earths of its mythos, Superman's desire to be human is interrupted by the reality of being Other, and, in being Clark, Kal, and Superman at once, it is necessarily supra-individual. Instead of rejoicing at being always-already different and new, this inescapable fact causes the character significant xenopsychic-emotional turmoil and a seemingly insurmountable sense of

isolation. The condition of the character's internal strife is predicated on the fact that loneliness and its cure in being interpellated into a diegetic community is a radically narrow solution that its experience of a diegetic terrestrial existence has conditioned it to accept as valid and rewarding. In this way, belonging, as Waid describes it, is a diegetically human solution for a diegetically alien problem, one that results from an incongruence between what the character is taught to be and what it is and is always-already becoming.

What I find particularly naive about this view is that it fails to assess the imbalance of exchange or simply the nature of the exchange between diegetic human being and diegetic being Other that Superman represents. The character's continual subservience to the contentment of human beings and the necessary self-splitting and self-repression this requires suggests that while diegetic human beings derive the psycho-physical comforts of having a powerful and benevolent protector, Superman gets nothing but misrecognition of self, duty, and an always-already incomplete or disrupted sense of belonging. Due to the fact that the character's onto-existential condition of powerful Otherness is precisely what disrupts its attempts to belong on a diegetic earth, this, at most produces traumatic self-denial and self-loathing, and at least traumatically affects how the character sees and understands itself.

XENOPSYCHOLOGY AND EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Superman's never-ending existential crisis ultimately comes down to two questions; “who is he, and what does he want?” (Straczynski 113). *Superman: Earth One* (2012) written by J. Michael Straczynski, illustrated by Shane Davis is concerned with Clark Kent coming to a decision about what “he” wants to do with “his” life. The entire story revolves around the dilemma of what Superman/Clark/Kal must do/wants to do on that earth. The story opens with a 20-year-old Clark, recent graduate of Smallville Junior College, sitting on a train from Smallville to Metropolis. It is characterized as 'a young man seeking his own path through life,' attempting to discover a role or position that it not only can occupy and perform, but that is right for it. Higher education is out, as Clark tells its new Metropolitan land-lady, “I graduated from Smallville Junior College this past November. That's as far as I'm planning to go at the moment” (Straczynski 11). Subsequently, Clark tries out for a Metropolitan American football team, dazzling coach, scouts, and players by being able to play offence, defence, receiver, safety, tackle, quarterback, halfback, and line-backer in a manner never before seen or thought possible (Straczynski 14). Clark is offered a starting position, no questions asked. Next, Clark seeks out a position in the applied research and development division of Neodyne Industries, a major Metropolitan science and technology corporation. Clark is told by a senior official that the company maintains rigorously high standards, hiring “the top five

PhD graduates every year from Harvard, Yale and Princeton [who] spent four YEARS working in [the] labs before they get near applied R&D” (Straczynski 19). In the adjacent room, the highest-paid researchers on that earth work on one of the company's four priorities, namely deriving electricity directly from salt water. Clark is informed that the research team are close, lacking two equations to unlocking the process which they have been attempting for three years. Clark takes out a notepad and writes down an equation which it asks the official to give to the researchers. They are astounded to discover that in the space of a conversation, it has unlocked the secret of sustainable energy. It is offered a formal position on Neodyne's R&D team. On Page 23, the reader is shown a montage of potential roles and positions Clark is, by dint of its powers, supreme at: from major league baseball, to the Metropolis stock exchange, to civil engineering and architecture, to art. There is nothing that Clark cannot do and do perfectly by terrestrial standards. Clark later visits Jonathan Kent's grave. In an emphatic monologue that reveals the tension between the pedagogy of the Kent's, which would have Clark become Superman and use its powers in the service of humanity, and its own desire, it states,

“I know what you and mom want. And I understand why. But I can't do it. I can get a good job. A creative job that'll pay me more money than I can spend in a lifetime. Enough money to let me honor the promise I made while you were dying in my arms. To always look after mom. And I can be happy. All my life, I've been alone. I was alone as a kid because I didn't

know how to pretend to fit in. No matter what I did they could SENSE I was different. I didn't have a CHOICE. But now I DO have a choice. Now I KNOW how to fit in. How to pretend to be just one of the guys...And I want that. I want that bad. If I expose myself to the world, if I show them what I can do...I'll always be on the run. I'll never fit in. I'll always be on the outside, looking in. I'll be alone. Worse still, I'll have made the CHOICE to be alone. I couldn't make that choice before, but I can now. And I choose to be happy...to have a life. And isn't that what you said you wanted most? For me to be happy? I just didn't want you to think that I'd forgotten everything you taught me. There's still a lot I can do to help people, openly or otherwise. I can find cures...expose corruption...give the average guy a leg up when the world wants to crush him. Those things mean as much to me now as then...as much to ME as they meant to YOU. I won't disappoint you, dad. I swear it." (Straczynski 39-40)

What is particularly noteworthy about this story is that Straczynski shows that Superman is aware and capable of actively changing the entire notion of being within the context of the story's diegetic earth by advancing or radically revaluing the socio-cultural, economic and ideological apparatuses of human being without having to necessarily be 'Superman.' Because of its power, there are inestimable ways through which it could change a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality. As such, there is an ambivalence with regard to the Superman/Kal/Clark tridentity. If Superman were

serious about totally committing to being Clark Kent, and became a journalist which is a position that requires significant courage and character, and personal fortitude to report different/difficult stories which “he” does, why act in a cowardly, nebbish way continuously or at all? (Fingeroth 56).

While the above example suggests that Superman is deeply torn between being Clark, Kal, and Superman, there are examples that suggest that Superman is keenly aware, yet in denial of the fact that being ‘Superman’ is the only way it can derive any pleasure out of its powers. Consider *Superman/Wonder Woman* No. 4 “What Any Man Would Do” written by Charles Soule, illustrated by Tony S. Daniel (March, 2014.). In this story, Superman and Wonder Woman are involved in an intimate romantic relationship. It comes to pass that their relationship is made public. In what is presumably a post-coital scene, Wonder Woman says to Superman,

“You wish they could understand. It doesn't MATTER if you are with a goddess, because you are just like them You are CLARK KENT, raised in Kansas. But you cannot tell THEM that because the moment you do, Clark Kent ceases to exist. There will be ONLY Superman. But would that be such a bad thing? Why hide what brings you such joy? Whether ME, or your POWERS. I KNOW the truth. I see it every time you fly. The way you look at me when you think I'm not watching.” (Soule 2)

This idea is echoed in In *The Amazing Adventures of Superman* No. 242: “The Duel That Destroyed the Earth” (September, 1971) written by Dennis O'Neil,

illustrated by Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson. In this story, a conflict between Superman and its mystical doppelganger comes to a head. They challenge each other to a duel. While the resultant apocalypse the reader is shown is only a psychological simulation created as a cautionary vision by Wonder Woman's mentor I-Ching, Superman's doppelganger says to Superman during a pre-battle exchange:

SUPERMAN: "WHY--? Why can't we BOTH exist...in PEACE!—"

DOPPELGANGER: "Look into your HEART for the answer... As I said...one of us must DIE!

SUPERMAN: (INNER MONOLOGUE): "Is he RIGHT? AM I so PROUD?" (O'Neil)

Whether the character acknowledges it or not, I am impelled to consider the diegetic and extradiegetic ramifications of the pleasure Superman derives in being Superman. Despite the character's diegetic super-brain, vast powers, and the potential therein, and despite whatever good intentions, virtues, care or idealistic fantasies of humanity's so-called instinct toward good an extradiegetic reader may harbor, both Superman and the character's readers perpetuate the need for a savior. Against Waid's Romanticism, I argue that this is the truth about Superman and about ourselves.

The point here is, if it really wanted to save a diegetic earth, the character would strive to co-operatively and creatively help change it. Diegetically, this could take many forms: from as simple (when compared against what the

character's power can achieve) creating carbon sinks to offset the adverse effects of climate change, to reforestation projects, or as complicated and transformative as reverse engineering Kryptonian technology and DNA to help develop bio-technological photosynthesis to create viable and efficient solar technology to replace fossil fuels as humanity's primary energy source all together, for example. While Fingerioth concludes resolutely that “when superheroes try to change society proactively, things almost always end up worse than they were at the beginning,” Straczynski shows that this is not true: it can still change the socio-political, cultural and historical situation of many, if not all, of the earths of the DC hyperdiegesis directly, albeit within the delineations of State determined praxes or careers (Fingerioth 161).

The fact that the character chooses a moral solution suggests numerous conclusions. One of them is that Superman is, for a being that is descended from a super advanced civilization and the offspring of its final epoch's most celebrated scientist, either supremely short-sighted or lazy in its application of its comparatively limitless psycho-physical powers toward the goal of saving as many lives on a diegetic earth, present and future, as possible. Yet, with the character's obsession with and personal sensitivity to the importance of an acute understanding of bio-climatological and civilizational balance (the end of Krypton was a result of a disregard of this precarious balance), it would be morally admonishable and supremely negligible for the character not to even at least try to save an earth by actively and creatively changing it. In simply being on a

diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality, it passively already has. With the diegetic array of super-powers and senses the character possesses, Superman is constantly bombarded with the agony and depredation of nature and human life, and the latter's exacerbation of the former. As "They Call It Suicide Slum," in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 121, written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens and *Star-Spangled Comics* Vol.1, No. 13 "The Scoop of Suicide Slums" written by Joe Simon, illustrated by Jack Kirby show, within the diegetic context of Metropolis, Superman need not even look far to find evidence of this. The Suicide Slums, which are a part of Southside Metropolis marked by a drastically higher crime rate than the rest of the city, is the dystopian element within the utopian facade of Metropolis. If, therefore, a superpowered and intelligent being can crash-land on an earth, and if this being often chooses to use its powers beyond the stricture of diegetic human law (as the Superman's characterization in the 1930 and early 1940s shows), and if the diegetic State's authority on that earth cannot remove or destroy the authority its power allows, then there is no reason that it would be incapable of using this power in decisive and direct ways to save that earth by changing the structures and praxes that ensure the continual degradation of its various forms of life if it truly wanted to. But as noted in CHAPTER II, for the better part of two thirds of the character's publication history, it does not. It chooses to reproduce ideological frameworks and their attendant apparatuses that enforce, protect and reproduce socio-economic disparity between diegetic peoples, races,

nations, genders, and classes that not only result in the maintained degeneration of nature and human life, but also ensure the necessity or demand for a savior.

The latent question here is, within the context of its experience of human life within the diegetic earths of its mythos, why the character does not relinquish being an ideological tool, weapon, and static icon and instead attempt the difficult path of uprooting or attacking problems creatively and carefully which diegetic human beings, with their comparatively limited purview, have historically regarded as intractable? In response, one could conclude that the character chooses a role in diegetic socio-politics and culture that satisfies its desire for renown it learns mimetically from human beings and yet one that provides a sometimes tenuous cover for that striving for excellence as a superhero: it allows “him” to report on itself and its own success as a savior of a diegetic earth and its people.

In this way, its actions within the context of the diegetic earths of the DC hyperdiegesis are not about honoring Krypton or a diegetic earth, but itself. Fingerroth acknowledges but apologizes for this ethic, stating that

“the superhero, like most people, will not act, will certainly not effect change, unless there is no alternative – that makes him or her much like us. The prospect of no change...must have such unpleasant consequences that a protagonist, responding to outside forces, has no choice but to act, to attempt to bring about change.” (Fingerroth 162)

The implication here is that extradiegetically, readers are complicit in this passivity, despite the amazing power and will evidenced by the superbeing/costumed crime fighter characters they read. I accept that the fear of the uncertainties and potential pitfalls of the radical change I am discussing may be valid for a human being whose being is subject to hazards and fears that fictional comic book characters like Superman, with its transcendent, elemental, solar power, is not subject to. However, the fact that Superman historically elects to predominantly emulate a type of human reactivity, which in turn reproduces and ensures more diegetic fear and oppression, is in many ways unacceptable. Fingerroth accepts that a superhero “has no axes to grind, no agendas to put forth and pursue” whose role, “akin to that of the idealized police officer in a democratic society,” is “to get the cat out of the tree, not to prune the tree or discipline the cat” (Fingerroth 162).

Superman's grappling with decisions of what to do with its power and Otherness in the above example leads one to ask how Superman diegetically chooses between actions. This question emerges because any moral consideration of the devaluation of being and nature on a diegetic earth would demand the death of Clark Kent and a total acquiescence to the demands of moral purity and perfect altruism in order to maximize the good of all sentient beings on an earth that the character's power could bring into effect. In this sense, having a third of a life with Lois, for example, is less morally imperative than saving the lives of those in peril. As Brian Feltham notes in his essay

“Action Comics! Superman and Practical Reasoning” (2013),

“notice how much time he spends saving Lois Lane and his other friends.

He doesn't randomly pick someone to save – the fact that Lois is his friend and love is a reason for him to save her in particular. He also takes time out of the superhero business to enjoy something like a normal life (Clark Kent doesn't have much of a social life, but he does spend time doing things that might seem to fall short of the moral importance of saving lives).” (Feltham 20)

Yet, due to its commitment to this third of its life with Lois, it can overrule the moral imperative of saving the lives of billions by symbolically doing so, prioritizing the lives of those it cares about. As such, attempting to create or appropriate the elements of a “normal life” take precedence over the well-being of the people of a diegetic earth all the time. As such, the character's varying levels of commitment to itself and the people of the diegetic earths it encounters in its adventures absolve it from the relentless pressure of human morality.

Another conclusion to be drawn from this construction is that if Superman is a diegetic mirror that reflects extradiegetic and diegetic human being, it suggests that constructions of morality are loose enough to slip out of in pursuing our commitment to ourselves. For Superman, however, regardless of whether it endorses or ignores moral programs, the problems of its diegetic disruptivity remain. What is at stake here is the conventional acceptance of the

idea that moralized 'Truth' and 'Justice' are the 'best' *telois* for the character's power and Otherness. This brings us back to the question of whether Superman wants to change the world or preserve it in such a state that it is needed to continually save it, and our consideration of the consequences of Superman's paradoxical altruistic self-interest. With regard to the way the character uses its powers in a fractured and self-interested way within the context of its diegetic experience of an earth and its humanity, it stands to reason that Clark/Superman is not morally unimpeachable, not absolute in putting the needs of others before its own as the conventional altruistic myth surrounding the character would suggest.

The conclusion I draw here is that Superman is self-interested. While Clark Kent functions as a reader identification tool and a dissimulation device, it is simultaneously a direct manifestation of Superman's diegetic self-interest. Regardless of the satisfaction Clark Kent offers Kal-El in terms of belonging, Superman can never escape or forget that it has the power to actively catalyze the changing of a world. In this sense, its own power disrupts the comfort afforded by its feigned powerlessness. That said, to deny this irreducible fact is precisely what Superman needs to do to satisfy its own interests in Lois's love, fitting in, being Jimmy Olsen's Pal and so on. It seems reasonable to suggest that the character's care and moral disposition extend as far as its commitment to itself, to the pleasure it derives from being Superman, from the love it garners from Lois, and from the sense of purpose it derives from diegetic

humanity's repetitive need for its power. If diegetic humanity's suffering is a prerequisite for the need for and diegetic existence of the 'Superman' persona, and that the character desires most to belong to the world as it is and has been heretofore as 'Clark Kent,' and enjoys being both, then the character would have no reason or desire to actively change the world because ensuring that there were diegetic sufferers to save would be a greater deliberative priority than the possibility of reforming the conditions that make 'Superman' necessary in the first place. Superman/Clark Kent cannot reproduce themselves on their own. These identarian apparatuses require humanity and its suffering to sustain the mutually corrosive cycle of their diegetic socio-political and cultural reproduction. In *Superman/Batman* Vol. 1, No. 3 "The World's Finest, Part 3 of 6: Running Wild" (2003) written by Jeph Loeb, illustrated by Ed McGuinness, Batman notes that "it is a remarkable dichotomy. In many ways, Clark is the most human of us all. Then...he shoots fire from the skies, and it is difficult not to think of him as a god. And how fortunate we all are that it does not occur to him" (Loeb 2003) I argue that for the human beings and their civilizations represented in the diegetic context of the character's mythos, this situation is not as fortunate as it may initially appear.

SUPERMAN AND THE END OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

While diegetic humanity, as a reflection of extradiegetic humanity, presumably also evolved over time and overcame vast odds, as all species must, with courage, perseverance, ingenuity, and creativity, in his essay "Superman or Last Man: The Ethics of Superpower," David Gadon asks "doesn't Superman's involvement defeat the need for humanity to ultimately push itself up, up, and away into the future?" (Gadon 105). In other words, does such a critique of the character necessarily conclude that despite the individual value of its awe-inspiring abilities and 'heroics', Superman's intercession in diegetic human histories cultivates weakness in those it rescues, leaving an entire race dependent on 'Superman?' Such a critique leaves the character in a very precarious position. If its influence on a diegetic human history infantilizes that human race, and it is held existentially accountable therefore, it would also be morally contemptible for it not to influence that human history. The character cannot escape this tension between existential authenticity and moral probity because it does not matter how well Superman is able to make its Otherness and the power of its body invisible as both are always-already present, and will therefore always-already manifest in some way. The only way I can see it avoiding the detection of its power is exile from an earth. Even sequestering itself to the Fortress of Solitude in the Arctic is not enough as it is inevitable that a party of human scientists or the military personal or simply fishermen would

happen upon this location eventually, intentionally or no. Therefore, the inevitable display of its power invites questions that force the human beings of the DC hyperdiegesis to consider what it means to be greater than a being that not only disrupts human being, but constantly saves it, in order to save themselves.

The combination of diegetic power and Otherness also appeals to the extradiegetic reader whose existence, in comparison, is radically limited by his or her different level or access to power. In view of this difference, I argue that Superman's inspirational and aspirational aspects necessarily change. The reader begins to question not only his/her own sufficiency and the sufficiency of their power, but whether or not Superman is an inspirational or aspirational figure at all. The reader begins to ask why "tales of true human valor are [no longer] enough?" (Fingerioth 31). In this way, the character can be read as the marker of lack, one that suggests that the existence and celebration of beings like Superman in extradiegetic popular culture makes the reader feel pervasively inadequate. Regardless of how terraformed or seemingly noble the character's portrayal, as a diegetic representation of a powerful Other, Superman will always question the reader's humanity, the power that the reader possesses, and what he or she can and has used it for.

As such, "maybe we feel uncomfortable with the idea that we're not living up to our potential, or that someone [or something] else has more potential than we do. Or that they're living up to their potential better than we are to ours?"

(Fingerioth 32). To counter this feeling of existential persecution and insufficiency, Fingerioth also suggests that if something or “someone else isn't really playing on the same field or by the same rules we do...then maybe we don't have to feel so bad about ourselves” (Fingerioth 32). However, this postulate does not nullify the paradoxical tension that arises from the fact that, within the hyperdiegesis of the DC Multiverse, the character has always been drawn to look and behave like a human, and yet is able to do things both extradiegetic and diegetic humans can not. As such, it is impossible not to compare human being against superbeing on some level in view of the uncanniness of Superman's body and the power and Otherness thereof. Fingerioth suggests that “because Superman is from Krypton...we can't be from Krypton” and as such, have “no need to feel any worse about not being him than one would about not being able to stop a hurricane” (Fingerioth 32). In contrast, I argue that the process of experiencing the character's diegetic exploits in whatever format or medium invites the reader, viewer, or listener to not only imagine feats of spectacular individual power, but to desire such power for themselves as well. One can argue that the discrepancy of power between Superman and the reader is first diegetically separated, and secondly so vast that it mutes a desire for such power. However, this same discrepancy creates a tension between a fatalistic acceptance of one's own extradiegetic power, an abnegation of the pursuit of power, and a deferral of the responsibility of world-changing power to diegetic superpowered agents and the aesthetic and

narratological experience thereof. Included in this interdiegetic comparison and speculation is also the fact that the reader not only desires this power, but questions what Superman has done with its own diegetic power and Otherness within the diegetic histories of the many earths of the DC hyperdiegesis, and what he/she would do had they the power to tame hurricanes themselves. So, what should Superman do?

In answer to this question, I would emphasize that it is clear from the examples analyzed here that the burden of the experience of being a powerful Other within the context of a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality is high because Superman is faced with ethical decisions that impact the diegetic representation of an entire species that it is biologically superior to. As Gadon notes, in the face of its immense power, “every moment of every day, Superman is forced to choose when, if, and just how much he should interfere with the troubles that face humanity” (Gadon 107). Where does this xenological reading of Superman's power and Otherness and the comparatively narrow use thereof in view of the examples of the affective scale of said abilities above leave us? Gadon puts it best when he states, “what we find ourselves wishing is that Superman possessed the clarity to somehow foresee the long-term results of his actions, but sadly, seeing into the future is not among the many amazing Kryptonian powers” (Gadon 109). This lack of super-clairvoyance is in part attributable to the character's diegetic internalization of human values, which in turn reproduces human fallibility.

Diegetically, Superman did not ask to be a powerful Other. It did not volunteer to be sent to an earth, its presence on an earth originally being under the aegis of survival alone. While this is true, it is also evident that within the broader part of the character's publication history as presented in the DC hyperdiegesis, Superman is complicit in the ethical burden it bares because it is one it chooses to. Choices are also consequences: compassion contra overprotection, elevation contra atrophy and devolution, transvaluation contra devaluation, change contra stasis, active agent contra reserved bystander. In the last instance, the potential of humanity in the DC hyperdiegesis overcoming itself or being doomed to immutable stagnation is irrevocably influenced by the sway of Superman's power and what it chooses to use it for (Gadon 109). As such, despite its obsessive interest in an earth and the so-called well-being of its inhabitants, the character cannot change or save a world if that world does not first save or change itself, both for itself and by itself. This is equally true of Superman. I argue that in order to save a world by changing it, The character must revalue itself, its commitment to human ideology and values in a way that subsequently allows the radical xenological possibilities inherent in the disruptivity of its power, body, and Otherness to freely emerge.

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE KENTS

Since the character's arrival on an earth, as imagined within the diegetic context of the character's origin story, the importance of Martha and Jonathan Kent can be noted in the fact that they have acted as a kind of First Contact team within the character's mythos. As such, the strategies, values and world-view the character upholds are directly, that is firstly, consequences of its upbringing by the Kents. While Superman's hyperdiegetic ally Batman's "superheoric" quest centers on the pursuit of vengeance and closure against the man responsible for his parent's death symbolized by the broad idea of criminality he associates with their death, Superman's quest is faceless, bucolic and therefore less obsessive than its Gothamite counterpart. Fingeroth states,

"Superman has no murderous force who made him an orphan – perhaps the reason why his view of the universe is so much more benign, despite his having seen evil in a hundred galactic settings, despite his super-keen senses making aware of the slightest wrong being done at any time [...] Superman's quest is to use the power of Krypton and the values of Smallville to do good." (Fingeroth 74)

From Siegel and Shusters' *Superman* Vol.1, No. 1 (June, 1939) to "The Origin of Superman!" by E. Nelson Bridwell, Carmine Infantino, and Curt Swan appearing in *Amazing World of Superman* (1973), the Kents' role in the Superman mythos has changed over time. However, the tension between

Otherness, power and human morality is notable in what the Kents' actually teach Clark, and the values they instill in the character. In *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 53 "The Origin of Superman" (August, 1948) written by Bill Finger, illustrated by Wayne Boring, Superman's origins were updated. Finger and Boring not only provided the most sustained insight into Kryptonian way of life, from education, to personal aesthetic, to architecture, government, and technology seen up to that point, but they also introduced the elderly Kents into the mythology. The Kents adopt the infant Kal-El whose alien abilities are, from the beginning, disruptive to the systems, expectations and behaviors of human beings. As Clark 'matures' on this story's earth, in human terms, Martha (originally named Mary) Kent dies and soon after, so too does her husband, the unnamed Jonathan Kent. On his death bed, he distills the pedagogy of the Kents in the following exchange. Jonathan, says, "there's not much time, son...I'll do the talking...No man on Earth has the amazing powers you have. You can use them to become a powerful force for good!" to which Clark asks, "How, dad?" Jonathan continues,

"There are evil men in this world...criminals and outlaws who prey on decent folk! You must fight them...in cooperation with the law! To fight those criminals best, you must hide your true identity! They must never know Clark Kent is a...a Super-Man! Remember, because that's what you are...a SUPERMAN!" (Finger 10).

In *Superman* Vol. 2, No.2 (February, 1987) written and illustrated by John Byrne,

Superman reveals the influence of the pedagogy of the Kents as its primary example of human being when speaking to Lana Lang, stating,

“Ma and Pa were the most IMPORTANT people in the WORLD to me. They FOUND the rocketship that BROUGHT me here as a BABY from the planet KRYPTON. They were the only real PARENTS I've ever known. Everything I am, I owe to them. They gave me the guidance, the MORAL COURAGE, to use my powers wisely. They taught me to love this world, to love HUMANKIND so much, that when I finally discovered my true, alien origin, it didn't MATTER. Ma and Pa taught me how to be HUMAN. They were my hook into the REAL WORLD, Lana. The only people who never asked anything more from me than that I be HAPPY in the life I'd chosen for myself. No man or woman ever had KINDER parents...more LOVING parents.” (Byrne 19)

In *Man of Steel* No. 6 “The Haunting” (December, 1986) written and illustrated by John Byrne, the importance of the Kent’s teachings in ameliorating the human/Other conflict Superman constantly experiences is expressed in the following internal monologue:

“For twenty-eight years I've lived as an EARTHMAN, as a HUMAN BEING! I developed these fantastic POWERS, but I never suspected it was because my origin was ALIEN. I simply thought I was some, kind of...I don't know...some kind of MUTANT. Now, all that is GONE. The message of Jor-El is clear. My birthright lies in the STARS! It's not the

blood of HOMO SAPIENS that flows in my veins. It's the blood of a million generations of the planet Krypton. All that world's history is now within my memory, placed there by the last act of my real father. I can QUOTE from the great literature of Krypton's ancient culture. I can SUMMON before my mind's eye the great works of art. I can SPEAK the seven languages of Krypton's proudest epochs. I can SING ballads of its heroes. I know the NAME of Krypton's god, and all the PRAYERS that praised his name. All this is the last gift of Jor-El to his son. And all of it is ultimately MEANINGLESS. I may have been CONCEIVED out there in the endless depths of space...But I was BORN when the rocket opened, on EARTH, in AMERICA. I'll CHERISH ALWAYS the memories Jor-El and Lara gave me...but only as CURIOUS MEMENTOS of a life that MIGHT HAVE BEEN. Krypton BRED me, but it was Earth that gave me all I AM. All that MATTERS. It was KRYPTON that made me SUPERMAN...but it is the EARTH that makes me HUMAN!!" (Byrne 21-2)

Yet, In another flashback in *Superman: Earth One*, Clark recalls one of Jonathan Kent's teachings:

"I hope you CAN manage to go your own way without revealing yourself, Clark. I truly do. But there are things YOU can do that nobody else CAN. IMPORTANT things. Things that can mean the difference between life and death for a whole lot of people. I came up believing that sometimes we all have to serve something bigger than ourselves. We don't WANT to

do it, we'd give anything not to HAVE to do it...but we do it anyway. We square our shoulders and we get it done.” (Straczynski 72)

This last scene in particular underscores the influence of the pedagogy of the Kents as well as the nature of ‘Superman’ as an attempted synthesis of human ideology and personal desire, and the tension that results within the context of the power and Otherness of the character. Earlier in this particular story, it is revealed that Clark wants most to be happy and to have a life of its own and most importantly, to not be alone. However, this desire comes into conflict with the Kents reinforcing a dialectic of revealed/unrevealed, Kryptonian/human, selfless altruism/pursuit of happiness. In order to ameliorate the antithetical aspects of its own desire and wishes with the moral upbringing it was subjected to, the Kents encourage the combination of the antipodes of the character's being, Clark and Kal, into ‘Superman.’ As Superman, Kal can attain the sense of belonging it desires by being the champion of an earth, needed by its people, and instrumental in fulfilling their collective psycho-physical need for safety by being an enforcer of what appears to be a pure and rigorous morality summed up in the adage ‘Truth, Justice, and the America Way.’ Simultaneously, as Superman, Clark is able to live amidst human beings on their level, not from above as archon or paragon, but as a ‘man’ pursuing happiness, as it is brought up believing American men do. For the Kents, the question is consistently not whether or not Clark can help people creatively through any of the major and sub-disciplines of any culture or people anywhere on an earth, but it is primarily

about repelling the distressing feeling of solitude, solipsism, and isolation through the two points of contact Superman represents to diegetic humanity: 1) savior of humankind 2) member of humankind.

With the gravitas and trauma of the such death-bed imperatives noted above, and the consistent reinforcement of conservative and paradoxical teachings based on the tension between revealing and concealing itself, imagine, if anyone really can, the psychological ramifications such a disposition would have. The character's xenopsychological fracture and instability nevertheless germinate from its mimetic appropriation of diegetic human being. When discussing the subject matter for his unrealized Superman project titled "Superman: Flyby," writer-director J.J. Abrams stated,

"The thing that I tried to emphasize in the story was that if the Kent's found this boy, Kal-El, who had the power that he did, he would have most likely killed them both in short order. And the idea that these parents would see – if they were lucky to survive long enough – that they had to immediately begin teaching this kid to limit himself and to not be so fast, not be so strong, not be so powerful. The result of that, psychologically, would be fear of oneself, self-doubt and being ashamed of what you were capable of. Extrapolating that to adulthood became a fascinating psychological profile of someone who was not pretending to be Clark Kent, but who was Clark Kent. Who had become that kind of a character who is not able or willing to accept who he was and what his destiny was.

The idea in the movie was that he became Superman because he realized he had to finally own his strength and what he'd always been."

(Abrams 2013)

As such, Superman's self-understanding, world-view, and the ultimate 'purpose' of its power are mediated by the pedagogy of the Kents and have been from the moment it first crash lands on a diegetic earth. The Kents perform the exceedingly important role of focusing or limiting the character's understanding of its diegetic power. The question becomes whether the values transmitted by the Kents equal, in any way, the power, body, or Otherness of their star-fallen ward.

in *Superman for All Seasons* No. 1 "Spring," Martha says "Jonathan Kent...we brought him up right" in an attempt to assuage her husband's frustration and fear at being glaringly unprepared to raise an alien being, let alone one as powerful as Superman (Loeb 10). What are we to make of human beings attempting to raise an alien as their own, imparting human morals, ethics, ideologies of right and wrong, good and evil to a being that diegetically originates outside or beyond the history of these very formulations? Arriving on a diegetic earth as it does, deprived of/ freed from the presence of a referent or origin, Superman is found by the Kents in a Kansas corn field. From this point onward, the character is subjected to the pedagogy of the Kents, under whose tutelage it discovers what it is and where it came from while simultaneously being taught what it should be within the context of a diegetic earth. At the point

of its discovery, the character has no readily accessible model of identification but the Kents. For a long period, the length of which varies from writer to writer, of the character's diegetic terrestrial experience, it knows no other way of being but through the culture, language, and socio-political position that the Kent's themselves occupy and accept, which it subsequently reproduces in turn. However, the Kent's represent only a narrow example of human being on a diegetic earth, and in comparison to what the character's power and Otherness allow it to do as noted earlier in this CHAPTER, the Kents represent an extremely narrow example of being in general. The narrowness of this particular mode of being is made abundantly clear by the fact that there are recursive questions Jonathan and Martha Kent cannot readily answer let alone understand that appear throughout the character's mythos: what Kal-El is, what it can do, where it came from, or, aside from a rocket ship, how it got to Kansas.

As such, the Kents cannot identify themselves with the Other, who is, as their 'son', also a simulacra of themselves and their way of life whilst always-already being beyond it. Throughout the developmental period of the character's youth, it is taught to stifle itself, to not fully embrace its Kryptonianess because such a being, or an example of such being, would change their diegetic world, and/or potentially radically disrupt or destroy it. I argue that from the beginning of its time on a diegetic earth, Superman has suffered under the xenopsychological trauma of suppression and self-denial; that is, it has been taught to misunderstand itself, its body, power and Otherness. The morality of the Kents

teaches the character that the expressions of its power must always be inextricably used for utilitarian ends in the service of human beings. The result of which is that the character can only attain a simulacrum of what it desires, belonging, at the expense of its own xenopsychological fracture as a multiplicity of identities, which in turn results in the continued suffering of billions of human beings within the context of the diegetic earths of the DC Multiverse that reflect extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality. As such, I argue that because of the Kents, the human values they impart, and the character's insatiable need to belong to humanity, the character's xenopsychology is one of circuitous suffering, fracture, isolation and non-fulfilment.

In this sense, the pedagogy of the Kent's acts as the first site of its interpellation into the models, norms and values of human being, while always-already being alien to them. The lesson in human being taught by the Kents to Kal-El is like one given to an absentee student; one of a different class, a different set, a different stream or grade. As such, the tragedy of the character's xenopsychological turmoil cuts both ways. The fact that the Kents attempt to love something they do not truly nor ever could truly understand is what makes the love between Clark and 'his' parents so tragic. This tragic aspect is further compounded by the fact that all the love and lessons conferred on Superman can never ameliorate, in any total sense, the character's always-already active sense of alienation.

THE SUPERMAN MYTHOS AS THEORY AND PRACTICE OF FIRST CONTACT

In view of the latent science fictional aspects of the Superman mythos, I argue that the entire diegetic history of the character can be read as an extended meditation on the theory and practice of First Contact. As such, one of the areas of xenological inquiry Freitas Jr. mentions I need address at the close of this chapter pertains to what he calls the Theory and Practice of First Contact.

Describing its basic tenants, Freitas Jr. States:

“We have seen that the origin of life, the evolution of sentience, and the development of technology may be common processes in this universe. Many billions of intelligent races may exist in the Milky Way alone at the present time. Naturally, we are anxious to learn more about them if they exist -- if possible, to seek them out and have some sort of useful interaction with them. Presumably many of them will be similarly motivated to seek out their sentient brethren. It is for this reason that the general theory of first contact -- contact principles applicable to any interaction between any two extra-terrestrial civilizations -- is of such monumental importance to xenologists. Knowledge of the basic procedures and ethical considerations involved in first contact will serve two useful purposes: (1) To suggest ways other civilizations will interact with each other, what polities and societies they may establish, whether or not peace is likely, and so forth; and (2) To suggest what humanity

may expect when it first makes contact with an alien civilization from the stars.” (Freitas Jr. 2008).

Freitas Jr. further elaborates that the character of First Contact inquiry essentially seeks to speculate

“what will first contact actually be like? How will the participants regard each other? It is often suggested that when humanity encounters technologically advanced aliens they may seem as gods to us. It is said that they will be capable of miracles and, in essence, "magic" -- and that they may be as far beyond us in intelligence as we are beyond the ants.” (Freitas Jr. 2008).

In view of the above speculative framework, xenologically, Superman's power and Otherness are important aspects that shape the nature of its experience with diegetic humanity as First Contact. The criticism that describes the character's power as boring, a reductive deus ex machina construct, or unrelatable has become commonplace in creators, critics and consumers of popular culture. For example, in an episode titled “The Man Of Tomorrow” on Roman Mars's *99% Invisible* podcast series, Mars declares,

“I'm willing to concede from the get-go that I might be wrong about the entire premise of this story, but Superman has never really worked for me as a character. I preferred the more grounded Marvel Comic book character, like Spider-Man, who lived in real cities and had human thoughts and feelings. Superman is basically invincible, not relatable, and

oozed 'establishment'. (Mars 2013)

In response, I contend that this critical convention overlooks the fact that in order to allow all the xenological resonances of the character's power, body and Otherness to emerge, one must first relinquish of the privileged anthropocentric notion that the character, or any Other for that matter, should perforce be relatable. In the same episode, Glen Weldon counters Mars's apathy toward Superman by noting that

“the thing you have to understand about Superman is that he was never intended to be the character we identify with. He is not a hero like Batman, he is not a hero like Spider-man who have foibles and psychological hang-ups that we recognize and empathize with. He is not the hero we identify with. He is the hero we believe in. It's different. He's an inspiration. He's supposed to be better than us. That's right there in the name, he's called Superman for a reason. He exists to say we can be better, that we can achieve these ideals.” (Mars 2013)

While I endorse Weldon's point that Superman is not necessarily meant to be relatable, I diverge on the reason Weldon provides for the disjunction Mars and others feel toward Superman. As a figure of inspiration and emulation, Weldon still confines the disruptivity of the character's power and Otherness to the limits of human ideals. In contrast, I argue that the disruptivity of Superman's power and Otherness are diegetically onto-existentially outside the ideals of human being and, as such, must necessarily be evaluated beyond the restrictions of

human valiative systems.

While displays of the character's disruptivity such as those examined earlier in this CHAPTER can be interpreted in various ways, from a xenological standpoint, I propose that the disruptivity of the character's power of the character's body presents itself to diegetic human beings in ways that offer the potential to critically reassess diegetic human being as Jameson suggests, in a manner that subsequently opens up ways of setting diegetic representations of being into play, shifting and reorienting it in new ways, including but not limited to ideas of extra-terrestrial intelligence and agency, interstellar travel, the elevation of exobiology and xenology from speculative sciences to the most important sciences in view of the character's diegetic terrestrial presence(s), and the onto-existential potentials of 'aliud-sapiens' (Other-human) hybridization. As such, Superman's disruptivity, is both critical and transformative. It necessarily forces one to consider the alien body and the human body as spaces that affect, disrupt, and reorient one another.

Extradiegetic society and civilization, reflected in diegetic worlds of the DC hyperdiegesis, as mutating inter-corporeal spaces or linkage of spaces – the shared space of a State, community, or culture, for example – are disrupted by the character's alien body and its Otherness and power, as that which comes from outside and reorients the understanding of the inside from within it. Superman cannot be unconditionally ostracized from human being on the grounds of its Otherness because, for all intents and purposes, it grew up on an

earth. A stranger, certainly, but a visitor? No. As such, the character's habitual diegetic terrestrial existence also troubles here/from there, immanent/transcendent dialectics. On the contrary, the character's existence on diegetic earths and its wilfully maintained presence thereupon, disrupts those human histories, implicitly suggesting that the advent of Superman-on-a-diegetic-earth marks the origin of a new history. As Weldon suggests,

“he's called The Man of Tomorrow because that's been part of his DNA from the beginning. He was called The Man of Tomorrow long before he was called The Man of Steel. It was his original nickname basically because he helped point the way to the future to say here's what we can be.” (Mars 2013)

The residual theme of Superman as a being of limitless power suggests that it is through the disruptivity of the character's power, body, and Otherness that, as a species, the humans of the DC Multiverse truly move beyond the limitations of 'truth', 'justice', 'ideology', 'religion', 'race', 'human being', and even the limitations of the diegetic terrestrial spaces and times in which they manifest. Emergent in its diegetic displays of power is what the character is and is capable of. In view of the above examples, the xenological speculation of the character becomes less about who “Kal”, or “Clark”, or “Superman” is, but rather what the being wearing them can do.

Xenologically, what can one then read in the power of the character's body, the power of its Otherness and, in fact, the Otherness of its power? Within

the remit of xenological speculation, I argue that the character's power and Otherness gesture beyond ideology's ability to substantiate or justify, and that the rubric of human being is not enough to encapsulate Superman's being in any absolute way. The implications of the aforementioned examples taken from various decades of the character's publication history suggest that, xenologically, character's being is not pursuant to right or wrong. It is about power. As an example of diegetic Otherness, Superman has the power to act beyond both the merely deconstructive as well as the remit of a narrowly determined good and evil. The character can therefore catalyse the opening up of being in altogether unimagined and creative ways, beyond any cartography or knowledge that can be taught within the context of the earths of the DC Multiverse. In this sense, the confluence of its power and Otherness, taken to whatever extreme – from simple acknowledgement to maximal expression – is antithetical to not only dialectical morality, but being governed by a grid-work of human ideological systems and values, including human constructions of identity and belonging.

It is in this way philosophically fitting that the first socio-economically lucrative superhero character with global extradiegetic appeal, one responsible for thematic and aesthetic innovations in the medium of mainstream comics and animation, should be an alien. As a diegetic representation of an alien life-form, the value Superman serves in any xenological speculation regarding the nature of human being, its limits, and its potentials as imagined within the framework of

xenological speculation has to do with the fact that character is not human. Extradiegetically, for two and a half thousand years, all the scientists and philosophers in human history had no other type of being save those types found terrestrially to compare human being against. Diegetically, the character singularly personifies a radical questioning of the basic assumption that human beings were, up until it crash-landed in Kansas, the only intelligent life forms in a universe. Lois Lane registers the scale of the impact of Superman's disruptivity, both in terms of the times and the spaces of diegetic human being, when speaking with Jimmy Olsen about the paradigm shift Superman's existence and presence on an earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality effects, stating

“My dad used to tell me that everybody as an IT in their life, that there's your life before IT, and your life after IT. IT can be getting married, having a kid, losing a parent, getting cancer, finding true love—this was IT on a planetary scale, Jim. I don't think anyone out there understands what this REALLY means. The world has just been profoundly and irrevocably changed. As Einstein said after the atomic bomb, “everything has changed except our way of thinking”. It'll be years, decades before we can really get our arms around what this--.”

(Straczynski 126)

I agree with Straczynski's Lois in acknowledging that the myriad ways in which Superman's power, body, and Otherness disrupt diegetic humanity and its

history are so vast that they approach the unfathomable. As such, I cite Lane's statement here as a justification for my preference for raising the notion of Possibility with a capital P, rather than identifying or outlining an exhaustive catalogue of specific possibilities other than those articulated and understood in response to Superman's displays of power in the above examples. My point here is that regardless of the specific approach taken by artist/writer teams heretofore, each presentation of the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness ultimately gestures to same idea: a mode of being that is absolutely disruptive, able to overcome any and all limits or as Adam Roberts states, Superman "contains within [it] all that it takes to live gloriously, creatively and holily" (Roberts 119).

CHAPTER IV: FASCISM AND THE CONCEPT OF THE COMIC BOOK SUPERBEING

SUPERMAN AND THE CONCEPT OF SUPERPOWER-INDUCED PARANOIA: SURVIVOR

In view of the Superman's diegetic displays of raw physical power explored in CHAPTER III, it would not be unreasonable for a human being, within the context of one of the numerous earths of the DC hyperdiegesis, to feel uncomfortable at the thought of a being like Superman's continued presence on that earth. Superbeing-induced paranoia is a recurrent theme in numerous works of science fiction in various media. These include, but are not limited to, Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818); H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Marc Laidlaw's *Half-Life* (1998); Glen A. Larson's *Battlestar Galactica* (1978); the Don Siegel directed film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956); Hiroya Oku's manga *Gantz* (2000); and Brian Michael Bendis and Leinil Francis Yus' *Secret Invasion* (2008), for example.

Throughout its history, the narratological and aesthetic archetype of the science fiction superbeing has acted as a conceptual space through which writers, artists, game designers, and directors have addressed humanity's fear of domination and subjugation by an entity or entities both superior and fundamentally different from itself. One of the central themes in such narratives

is the question of what power is, who or what has access to it, and how it is deployed, deterred or distilled. In extradiegetic and diegetic human society, the possession and expression of heightened and/or supernatural psycho-physical abilities is consistently met with, amongst other things, fear. The presence of such a being in terrestrial spaces, extradiegetic and diegetic alike, is typically perceived and interpreted as either a radical questioning or direct threat to the sovereignty and survival of the human race as the pre-eminent species on the planet. As such, narratives such as those listed above imagine scenarios in which the appearance of a new and undeniably supreme affective agent disrupts the diegetic history in which it emerges by de-centering and subsequently revaluing the pre-existing dynamics and hierarchies of power in the same way that introducing a new apex predator into a foreign habitat can catalyse a radical destabilization, sometimes the total dissolution, of a pre-existing ecosystem.

In the diegetic worlds of superhero comics, both heroic and villainous superbeings' physical potency and ostensible indomitability construct a paradigm in which the superhero cannot be allowed the liberty to exist as it wills. The typical reactionary response to such beings in these narratives decrees that “whether [the being] becomes an outcast, a pathetically lonely creature who is ostracized, or a tyrannical monster so dangerous that [it] threatens to enslave the world”, it must be “either [eliminated] or robbed of [its] power” (Andrae qtd. in Coogan 127). In this way, any diegetic human attempt to eradicate or neutralize a superhero in response to its perceived threat is

ultimately an attempt to redress the power disequilibrium caused by the disruptivity of its being on an earth. As I illustrated in CHAPTER III, this hypothesis does not necessarily rely on the maximal expression of a superbeing's power, or any total definition or demonstrable understanding of what such phenomena might be, or how it might manifest, according to the laws and precepts of terran science. Simply being perceived as being superpowered on a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality in some way, and acting as a superpowered entity therein, the resultant disruptivity of a superbeing produces an inextricable link between the concepts of superiority, visibility, invisibility and fear.

There are non mainstream conceptions of the tension between this seen/unseen dialectic. Dave Gibbons and Ted McKeever's "Survivor" (1989) is a particularly helpful illustrative example thereof. "Survivor" (1989) written by Dave Gibbons and illustrated by Ted McKeever appears in Atomeka Press's *A-1* (1989) graphic novel anthology series edited by Garry Leach and Dave Elliot. Initially beginning as an independent series that ran in the late 1980s, publishing mostly single issue showcases that often featured characters with a publication history elsewhere, such as *Heavy Metal* magazine and *Warrior*, *A-1* was subsequently published under Marvel Comics' Epic Comics imprint in 1992. The series ran through five issues, which compiled the work of notable writer-artist creator teams including Dave McKean, Scott Hampton, Martin Emond, Alan Moore, and Kent Williams. Unlike the initial *A-1* series, which featured a page

count that ranged from 64-128 pages, under the Epic Comics imprint, and Leach and Elliotts' editorship, the volumes appeared in a more standardized forty-eight-page colour format. Comic book archivist and reviewer Greg McElhatton of *Read About Comics* states in his review of *A-1: Big Issue* No. 0 describes Gibbons and McKeever's "Survivor" as being "often referred to as the best Superman story ever told, despite [its protagonist] not actually being officially Superman" (McElhatton 2004). According to McElhatton,

"Gibbon's take on the outsider from another world is bittersweet in its protagonist's attempts to fit in and never truly managing to do so. In just ten pages Gibbons shows a complete and utter understanding of Superman, even as McKeever cleverly draws everything from Superman's viewpoint, with his outstretched hands grasping outwards, forever empty, into each panel." (McElhatton 2004).

The sense of isolation, subterfuge, and displacement Superman experiences, as discussed in CHAPTER III, manifests in the tension between being seen and unseen experienced by the unnamed protagonist in "Survivor." The text's homogenous phenomenological first-person viewpoint compounds the text's theme of entrapment, isolation and monotony. These concepts are underscored by the character's repetitive mantra "I feel nothing" that runs throughout the text's ten pages. This theme of radical onto-existential isolation, and its subsequent paranoia, is also expressed by the fact that there is no dialogue in the text, and the narrative develops as an extended inner

monologue, further implying that no meaningful or, at least, equal exchange can occur between diegetic human beings and diegetic superbeings.

The unnamed Superman analogue and protagonist of the text opens the narrative by stating “I feel nothing. Eternity yawns before me. An eternity of possibilities with only one certainty. Eternity is mine. I will live forever. By myself alone in the universe” (Gibbons 25). As the character flies toward to the text’s diegetic earth, it further elaborates on its solipsistic condition, stating that it has “no family or friends to love [it], alone forever” and that “earth calls me back, the nearest thing to home I have. Yet the furthest thing from home there is” (Gibbons 25). This recalls the tension between what it is a diegetic earth can offer a comic book superbeing like Superman, with its array of powers and abilities, in order for it to consider its existence at most rich, and at least, meaningful. As such, like Superman, the protagonist of “Survivor” cannot reconcile its onto-existential status as radically Other and powerful with the socio-political, cultural and historical values and ideals of diegetic humanity. It cannot partake of the comforts, loves, and reprieves to be found in belonging to such a world and its human communities because it is fundamentally and radically different to them bio-physically, the result of which creates an onto-existential impasse between characters like Superman and the protagonist in “Survivor” to the rest of their respective diegetic representations of humanity. While they are strong, invulnerable, fast and indefatigable, humanity is soft, weak, monotonous and susceptible to pain (Gibbons 25). McKeever portrays

this concept aesthetically in that the figuration of the human beings the text's protagonist encounters are drawn with the same general appearance, regardless of sex, as being being sluggish, doughy and somewhat monstrous. As such, the result of this fundamental difference in the onto-existential conditions of the protagonist and the humanity it encounters in Gibbons and McKeevers' diegesis, is extreme isolation. The crowds of seemingly indistinguishable human beings on the text's diegetic earth are in a seemingly constant state of opposition with the condition of diegetic superbeing. Aside from mortality, this condition of extreme isolation manifests itself in terms of characters like Superman and the protagonist of "Survivor" having to maintain a pretence or performance of humanity. The protagonist of "Survivor" states

"I try to live like them. I hate it. I eat, though I never hunger. I taste nothing. Music is noise. Art is contrivance. Television is hesitant. Flickering static. I go to bed though I never sleep. I lie there but I never dream [...] The most intense sensations of this world are too feeble to touch me" (Gibbons 26).

This pretence also manifests in the form of adopting a human lifestyle in order to dissimulate difference in routine and convention. Like Superman, the protagonist of "Survivor" has a job, an apartment, a supplementary persona that attempts to obfuscate its essential difference from the performance of human normalcy it relies on to go unnoticed (down to its use of fake spectacles) and maintain its purchase on what can be described as a normal life, by

extradiegetic human standards. Like Superman, it is able to do so because, although the reader is only shown its physical form (in silhouette) in the text's final panel, it presumably looks like a human being. As such, it is able to mimic human imperfection perfectly. However, this attempted integration and assimilation of human codes and values does not prevent the character from not feeling friendship and common purpose with the rest of the diegetic humanity of the text. More problematically, this onto-existential impasse inculcates a deep sense of paranoia in the character who states "they are suspicious, distrusting," leading it to conclude that humanity, on some level, despises it (Gibbons 27). This paranoia is predicated on the seeing/being seen dyad that functions at the core of both Superman's relationships with the humanities of the many earths of the DC hyperdiegesis.

However, Gibbons suggests that revelation of radical onto-existential difference to the humanity in the narrative of "Survivor" does not produce a paradigm shift in thinking about the socio-political, philosophical and scientific values that existed before, but rather persecution, fear and hatred (Gibbons 28). In an effort to allay this paranoia, the protagonist in "Survivor" flies into a mountain to try and knock itself out in an attempt to attain some reprieve from the relentless pressure of being Other in a diegetically human world. It succeeds, and what follows are a series of violent and disturbing misanthropic dream-images. The character dreams of violently annihilating the entire human race on that diegetic earth with little effort (Gibbons 30). The implication here is

that, barring the xenopsychological problem of alien psychology, the latent content of the terrestrial experience of power and Otherness of beings like Superman subconsciously exist in a binary state, a dialectic of total destruction of others, or self-annihilation.

This dialectic can be noted in the fact that after the protagonist of “Survivor” dreams of destroying every living thing on its earth, it turns its “merciless superhuman muscles” against itself, drowning itself in its own blood. In this sense, death, be it of an entire species, or itself, is subconsciously viewed as a release. The irony of Gibbons and McKeever narrative and aesthetic construction is the fact that this latently thanatotic binary will always-already result in the radical isolation of the character itself. This is made apparent in the conclusion the character draws about itself, its relationship with its own power and otherness, and their subsequent relationship with diegetic humanity:

“There is no place for a being such as I in this world. I am an anomaly. A singularity, distorting the human continuum by my passage through it. And for what? That a few may live who would have died? That a few who would have walked free be imprisoned? Yes. That is all. Nothing more. I look upon my meagre achievements. I feel nothing. My true potential is for destruction, domination, the imposition of will through strength. Humanity knows it and fears me. I know it and fear myself. There is but one course of action. I must die.” (Gibbons 31)

However, this idea of death is, ultimately, not portrayed as an end to life, but as

an end of superbeing in the text. The text concludes with the protagonist using a device, in conjunction with the machinations of its human nemesis (a thinly veiled Lex Luthor analogue) to “kill” both itself, and the text's pseudo-Luthor as well. While it succeeds at the latter, the last page of the text shows the protagonist being “reborn” as onto-existentially naked, completely mortal, with slower, quieter thoughts, bad eyesight, physical weakness, the ability to feel pain – all without a costume (Gibbons 34).

As such, one of the conclusions to be drawn from the text's meditation on the tension between power and Otherness on a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality is that the only way a superbeing caught in a dialectic between human and non-human being, to feel joy or fulfilment, is for one side or the other of this dialectic to be extinguished, that is, remain fully hidden or fully revealed, to die or to live. As such, the only time the character is fully shown, albeit in silhouette, is when the aspects of its once onto-existential difference, and the unassuaged tension that results from the xenological impasses between diegetic humanity and diegetic Otherness, have been fully excised from its being by a radical acquiescence to humanity and mortality. One of the implications the text's creators leave the reader with is that the only way for a comic book superbeing with powers and abilities that resemble those of Superman within the context of a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality to be fully 'seen', that is, successfully and peacefully integrated, is the radical abandonment of any

aspects of its being that would radically differentiate it from the human mélange in which it finds itself.

THE LATENT FASCISM OF SUPERMAN

Despite the character's ostensible message of peace and altruism, the combination of Superman's power and Otherness in the diegetic earths of the DC Multiverse is enough to induce malaise and paranoia within their inhabitants. Like the protagonist in "Survivor," these aspects of the character are latent, and subsequently invite exigent questions: due to the xenopsychological trauma caused by its onto-existential impasse with diegetic humanity, how does the character view humanity? When and how is it using its penetrative powers of observation to look into human lives? Is its agenda within the context of a diegetic earth unyieldingly benevolent and altruistic? Being a powerful alien with no essential biological or socio-cultural responsibility to the planets it encounters or their peoples, what guarantee is there that it would not one day cease to be a hero and become a conqueror? Similarly, Fingerroth asks,

"do superheroes provide an image of 'friendly-fascism'? Is the very idea that they know when and how to do the right thing inherently instilling a misguided sense of dependence on authority in those who partake of these fantasies? Is a society that idealizes a Superman one that will fall prey to the myth of an Aryan Übermensch?" (Fingerroth 21)

While I contend Fingerioth's somewhat reductive use of the term *Übermensch* in relation to the relationship between Superman and fascism, I argue that the fascistic subtext inherent in the disruptivity of the character's power and Otherness is not only expressed by the fact that Superman is a superpowered agent of a particular ideological program, but is also inherent in the fact of a being as powerful as Superman existing on an earth whose power, and the range thereof, also expresses a decidedly penetrative quality. Such considerations are made all the more exigent by the comparative omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence its power allows, relative to the humanities it encounters in the DC Comics hyperdiegesis. This sense of unease is multiplied in both space and time by the fact that, provided Superman has access to the radiation of a yellow sun, it is, for all intents and purposes, immortal. As such, the longevity of the character and the power of its Gaze can be argued to only lead to a dystopian conclusion predicated on a never-ending unequal distribution of power. This concern is made visually explicit in the following examples:



Fig. xxxii. taken from “Superman, King of Earth” in *Action Comics* Vol. 1, No. 311 (April, 1964). Written by Curt Swan, illustrated by Robert Bernstein. Cover.

Consider Figure xxxii. In this pre-*Crisis* story by Curt Swan and Robert Bernstein, Superman and Clark Kent are split into two separate beings under the effects of red kryptonite. One, a tyrannical Superman, forces the United Nations to declare it king of the world, leaving the other, a de-powered Clark Kent, no choice but to lead an underground resistance movement against its despotic self. Not only does this story centralize the residual conqueror/redeemer tension inherent in the character's power and Otherness, but Swan elects an interesting aesthetic through which to illustrate this tension.

Notice how the four figures in the foreground are depicted 'come bearing gifts' in a way that evokes comparisons to the Biblical Magi bringing gifts to the infant Christ in the Christian nativity narrative detailed in Matthew 2: 1-12 (New King James Version). Furthermore, the fact that the United Nations are all gathered to pay tribute and allegiance to Superman evokes the passage from Psalm 72: 11: "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him." What makes Swan's depiction of Superman-as-conqueror effective is that its aesthetic references to Biblical portrayals of Christ-as-redeemer are inverted, literally usurped by the themes of autocracy and invasion. With Swan's cover, the celebratory and hopeful reverence of the arrival of the Other in Christ gives way to paranoid considerations of whether or not ruling the world is in fact Superman's true design within the context of a diegetic earth. The cover invites the reader to reconsider the character's ostensible benevolence and ask her/himself whether or not Swan's depiction instead shows, as Yeats asks in "The Second Coming," a "rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouch[ing] towards Bethlehem to be born?" (22).

Consider Figure xxxiii. below. In this story, Superman and Batman join forces to expose the dictatorial “Kor-El”, who is truly the energy/power absorbing supervillain Parasite, and overthrow his tyrannical conquest of that earth.

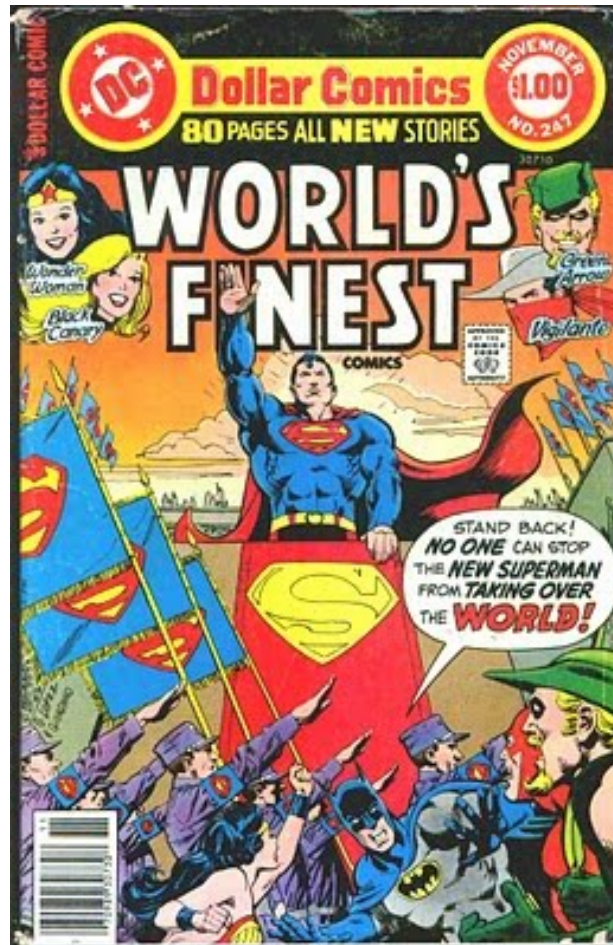


Fig. xxxiii. taken from “Last Hurrah for a Superman?!” appearing in *World's Finest* Vol. 1, No. 247 (November, 1977) written by Bob Haney and illustrated by Kurt Scharffenberger. Cover.

José Luis García-López's aesthetic evokes the fascistic potential of Superman's power symbolically through the garb and procession of the marching banner-men in the foreground. Notice how the composition and iconography of the cover, from the flags, the podium, the arm-bands, to the Roman salute of the

exaggeratedly colossal and ominously looming “Superman” and its legions are analogous with those seen in the Nazi Party's Nuremberg Rallies in Germany from 1923 to 1938.



Fig. xxxiv. taken from *Countdown to Adventure* Vol. 1, No. 2 “Forerunner Part Two: The Origin of Species” (November, 2007) written by Justin Gray, illustrated by Travis Moore.

The 'Nazification' of Superman underscores the potential fascistic use of its immense power. Figure xxxiv. is taken from a post-*Crisis* story in which Forerunner, a genetically engineered humanoid warrior, arrives on an Earth on which the Nazis won World War II. This story features an alternate version of the Justice League called Die Gerechtigkeitsliga of Earth-10. The JLAxis (as they are known thereupon) serve as superpowered agents of the Nazi party who, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, not only won World War II, but subsequently took over that world. In this way, the Superman of Earth-10 (named 'Overman') is a symbol of the fascistic use of transcendent power, and Earth-10 itself is a conceptual space dedicated to the exploration of the consequences of such an outcome. For example, life on Earth-10 is governed by eugenics whereby individuals are separated by the quality of their genes. Those with the strongest genes are gathered and marshalled to breeding centres and are forced to reproduce with one another. Conversely, those with the weakest genes are murdered in a pogrom of mass genocide. Aesthetically, Overman is made to physically and symbolically represent the ideals of masculine physical perfection espoused by Nazi doctrine. This involves substituting the 'S' insignia for a Swastika, and changing its hair colour from blue-black to blonde, cut in the curtailed "Hitler Youth" style popular amongst Wehrmacht officers in Nazi Germany.



Fig. xxxv. taken from *Superman: The Dark Side* Vol. 1, No. 1 (August, 1998) written by John Francis Moore, illustrated by Kieron Dwyer. Cover.

Figure xxxv. is a cover detail taken from an Elseworlds story where Kal-El's rocket crash-lands on Apokolips, the infernal ecumenopolis ruled by the supervillain Darkseid. In the story, Kal-El is raised and trained to be Darkseid's herald and foremost general, willingly participating in the destruction of New Genesis, the home planet of the New Gods of Jack Kirby's Fourth World (1970-1973) metaseries. Like the Overman of Earth-10, the connection between fascism and Kal-El as Darkseid's disciple is rendered symbolically through the doubling and restyling of the 'S' insignia to resemble the Schutzstaffel insignia of Hitler's foremost paramilitary organization namely, the SS. While the aforementioned examples treat the notion of Superman-as-fascist in aesthetically different ways, I argue that the underlying theme of the fear of an

extra-terrestrial taking over a world, either independently or in conjunction with human beings and their ideologies, is the same.

NO SHADOW IN THE WATCHTOWER: SUPERMAN AND PANOPTICISM

The paranoia caused by Superman's presence on an earth is examined in depth in Mark Millar's Elseworlds story *Superman: Red Son* (2003). The premise of *Red Son* is that Superman's rocket crash-landed twelve hours later in Communist Russia instead of the Kansas wheat fields. Instead of growing up in the familiar setting of Smallville, the Superman of *Red Son* grows up on a communist collective farm in the Ukraine, Soviet Russia of Earth-30.

Subsequently, it diligently serves all over the globe in the ways one typically expects of the character, preventing catastrophes, saving lives and so on. In this capacity, it also acts as the upholder of Communist ideals, the champion of the common worker, Socialism, and the expansion of the Warsaw Pact under Joseph Stalin. In *Red Son*, Millar conflates the underlying paranoia associated with Superman's power, body, and Otherness (particularly its powers of observation) with McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare of the Cold War. Here, the term McCarthyism refers to the practice of making strident accusations of subversive, treasonous, and disloyal behaviour against the United States without fair regard or collection of supporting evidence in order to repress political dissension and criticism. The term was originally used in reference to

the critique of anti-communist programs of the Republican U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy. Additionally, the phrase Second Red Scare here refers to a period in American history, from approximately 1950 to 1956, which was characterized by the prevalence of heightened anti-communist persecution and political repression, which included fear mongering propaganda campaigns that promoted widespread fear of communist influence on American institutions, including the infiltration of both federal government and American society, and espionage at the hands of Soviet agents. The extradiegetic paranoia of this period is diegetically represented as early as the opening scene of the text. In a national address, the U.S. president, modelled on John F. Kennedy, declares that the existence of “a costumed INDIVIDUAL more effective than [America's] HYDROGEN BOMB,” whose “very EXISTENCE threatens to alter [America's] position as a world superpower FOREVER” is enough to initiate wide-spread paranoia and psychological terror (Millar 11). In other words, the existence of a being with “SUPER-HEARING: IMPENETRABLE SKIN: EYES THAT CAN SEE THROUGH WALLS and fire LASER BEAMS” affects America's standing as a preeminent democratic world superpower. The president underscores this point by stating, “the feds, the army and the C.I.A are all OFFICIALLY OBSOLETE” (Millar 11; 13). Similarly, in an exchange with Lois Lane, Perry White vocalizes the resultant paranoia of the public disclosure of the existence of such a being, stating: “GREAT CAESAR'S GHOST! Superman spotted in DENVER! Superman sighted in NEBRASKA! Superman seen HOVERING OVER A FIELD

in ARKANSAS! What the hell's GOING ON here, Lois? It's like the whole damn country's seeing RED CAPES under their beds" (Millar 12). From televised eye-witness accounts, to personal conversations, Millar gives a cross-section of the type of paranoia the mere existence of a being like Superman elicits in a diegetic public. This is exemplified by a traumatized night-watchmen who states,

"I was just coming OFF-DUTY when I saw a human-shaped FIGURE zip past me and then I heard LAUGHING up there in the clouds. They say he can see us from SPACE with those super-eyes of his and that he's watching our EVERY MOVE. Just biding his time for the PERFECT MOMENT to STRIKE. Rumour has it his bosses back in MOSCOW are pushing for a FULL-BLOWN INVASION in a matter of WEEK'S now."

(Millar 12)

In another scene, an alternate Martha Kent converses with an associate outside Kent's hardware store, where both elderly women discuss their feelings of paranoia caused by the public disclosure of the existence of a being like Superman and what it is capable of: "WOMAN: "Heck. The whole COUNTRY'S lining their walls with lead, Martha. We can't have Superman watching us on the toilet with that horrible X- RAY VISION of his, now CAN we? The good people of SMALLVILLE have their DIGNITY to think of", to which Martha replies "Oh my lord. Ain't it enough they got their SATELLITES and enough NUCLEAR BOMBS to blow us all up TEN TIMES OVER without STALIN'S SUPER-SPACEMAN TOO? I just thank my lucky stars dear sweet JONATHAN never

lived to see the day this country would be brought to its KNEES like this.” (Millar 12)

It is later revealed that Stalin is poisoned and subsequently dies. Shortly afterwards, an encounter with Lana Lazarenko (the Soviet version of Lana Lang in the *Red Son* diegesis, Superman's long-time Earth-0 confidant and love interest), reveals to Superman that her and children, and much of the story's version of the Soviet population, are victims of widespread food shortages, malnourishment, and extreme privation. Spurred on by the basic needs of the people, Superman declares that it “COULD take care of everyone's problems if [it] ran this place, [and finding] no good reason [not to],” it subsequently succeeds Stalin to become Premier of the Soviet Union (Millar 54). It is later revealed that under Superman's sovereign control of not only the Soviet Union, but its allies under the Warsaw Pact, that

“the Soviet Union was just a FRAGILE ASSEMBLY when Superman first came to power. TWO DECADES LATER AND THE WHOLE WORLD is [its] ally. Only the UNITED STATES and CHILE choose to remain independent: The last two Capitalist Economies on Earth and both on the brink of fiscal and social COLLAPSE. The rest of the world was GLAD to volunteer total control to Superman and watched in awe as [it] rebuilt their societies, running their affairs more efficiently than any HUMAN could. POVERTY, DISEASE and IGNORANCE have been VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED from WARSAW PACTSTATES...DISOBEDIENCE to the

PARTY has been VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED.” (Millar 62-3)

After jointly thwarting a plot to assassinate Superman by Batmankov (the Soviet Earth-30 version of Batman), Wonder Woman, Superman's closest and most steadfast ally, is left de-powered in a catatonic state. Following this incident, Superman's views on power, the people, and their control are radicalized whereby its influence on the fate of the entire planet and its people becomes more direct and extreme. Superman confesses that

“[b]arely any decision was made across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union without my permission in SOME form or another. The population was largely GRATEFUL and OBEDIENT but the freedom fighters, inspired by the death of Batman, remained something of a PROBLEM. My desire for ORDER AND PERFECTION was matched only by their dreams of VIOLENCE AND CHAOS. I offered them UTOPIA, but they fought for the right to live in HELL.” (Millar 101)

It is important to note precisely how Superman maintains discipline and control in its global regime. It is revealed by the re-programmed Brainiac, one of Superman's most dangerous and longstanding Earth-0 enemies, that Superman maintains obedience through “a steady hand and some pioneering neurosurgery [through which] even the most persistent trouble-makers can become productive workers”, going on to state that “if [Brainiac's] OWN rehabilitation isn't proof enough, surely [Superman's] other former enemies cleaning toilets in Bombay is a tribute to the success of [Superman's] initiatives” (Millar 108). In effect,

Superman uses coercive neurological technology – depicted as a type of lobotomization – to turn dissidents and enemies into productive, albeit will-less, drones. Under this regime, it is revealed at the beginning of the last third of the narrative that

“[t]he world now contained almost six billion communists [where] Moscow tick-tocked with the same Swiss precision as every other town and city in [its] global Soviet Union. Every adult had a job. Every child had a hobby and the entire human population enjoyed the full eight hours sleep which their bodies required. Crime didn't exist. Accidents never happened. It didn't even rain unless Brainiac was absolutely certain that everyone was carrying an umbrella. Almost six billion citizens and hardly anyone complained. Even in private.” (Millar 106-7)

What is most important in considering the paranoia caused by Superman's power here is how Millar addresses the consequences of the character using said power in a singularly totalizing manner by allowing its disruptivity to be assimilated into institutionalized technologies of power. In so doing, the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness becomes the physical embodiment of the panopticon as discussed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). I argue that the character's inherent panopticism is based on the penetrative nature of its being which disrupts the see/being seen dyad in a radical way. Due to the combination of its power and its ability to sublimate its Otherness in the uncanniness of its body, it can

operate with immunity both visibly and invisibly. *Red Son* emphasizes the importance of the fact that though Superman may dedicate its powers to what it believes or has interpellated to believe, to be the service of humanity, the oppressively panoptic aspects of its powers cannot be nullified by the so-called benevolence of the way in which they are used.

In order to discuss the panopticism of Superman's power and Otherness within the context a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality, I will briefly first describe what a panopticon is. A panopticon is a type of building designed by English social theorist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. It consists of a circular structure arranged around an observation or inspection tower at its centre. From within the tower, a single observer is able to watch the inmates, who are assigned to individual cells arranged around the perimeter, without being observed in turn. The concept is to turn visibility itself into a trap or enclosure that sustains a particular type of power relation predicated on a seeing/being seen dyad. As Foucault describes,

“Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. Another primary effect of the design of the Panopticon is that the inmates themselves are

unable to tell whether or not they are being observed at any given time.”

(Foucault 201)

Without aid of recording and surveillance technology, it would be physically impossible for a single human supervisor to simultaneously observe all inmates in every cell. However, the fact that the inmates cannot definitively know how and when they are being observed impels all inmates behave as if they are being watched at all times, effectively surveilling and controlling their own behaviour constantly. Bentham describes this phenomena of self-surveillance as the idea of the inspection principle. As such, the panopticon is a biopowered mechanism for producing “a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind” that automatizes and disindividualizes power; or as Foucault describes,

“[t]he major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault 201).

The design of the panopticon emphasizes a dialectic of visibility/invisibility, which, in turn, presents polyvalent applications. This means

that,

“it does not matter what motive animates [the watchman]: the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing [...] The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power. A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation.” (Foucault 203)

As a result, such a design and the concept of its functioning can be applied to any institution that employs surveillance as a method of discipline and punishment, including prisons, day-cares, asylums, schools, hospitals, and sanatoriums. Foucault states, that

“the arrangement of [a] room, opposite the central tower, imposes on [its occupant] an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another; if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of

work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised.” (Foucault 202)

In principle, the panopticon describes a material technology of disciplinary power that is practiced, maintained, and situated primarily in an architectural, inanimate construction. The panoptic structure is first a building before it subsequently becomes a psychological structure and method of exerting the power of psychological discipline, punishment, and control. Unlike Bentham's panopticon, which functions by individualizing those interred therein by subjecting them to a disindividualized form power, diegetically, Superman is radically individual, in both its unmatched power and Otherness. As such, the combination of the character's powers of surveillance and its actions as a socio-politically corrective agent and symbol of continual moral rearmament, whose function as a superhero is to discipline and punish aberrant, unlawful, and 'bad' behaviour, embodies this type of panoptic power which ultimately produces homogenous and homogenizing effects. For the extradiegetic or diegetic sceptic, moral relativist, or frightened/paranoid individual, Superman's powers of surveillance could very well be motivated by the discreet (Clark Kent) and indiscreet (Superman) voyeurism of a socio-political and onto-existential Other, the malice of a being who cannot fully extirpate its Otherness from its desire to

belong to a world and its people which it is fundamentally Other too, a being's thirst for knowledge about a species entirely other yet uncannily similar to itself, or simply the pleasure of exercising its power over inferior creatures by playing the role of a god amongst mortals (Foucault 202).

Red Son is helpful in illustrating how the panoptic principle used to monitor, discipline, and reproduce docile bodies is not only inherent in Superman's power, but embodied by it. The combination of the character's protean onto-existential Otherness and its radical power provide it with total panoptic access to diegetic human being. Its X-Ray vision and super-hearing allow Superman an absolute purview over human being within the remit of a diegetic earth in the same way that the occupant of the central observation tower of Bentham's panopticon does. While Bentham's panopticon is an architectural configuration of forces that allow one supervisor to observe, discipline, and control hundreds of psychotics, patients, workers, pupils, or convicts, Superman's observational powers represent the radical embodiment, expansion, and refinement of the same coercive apparatus because through the character's powers, this principle is applicable to an entire human race. Unlike the extradiegetic inanimate and static panoptic structure bound to a single locale that can be torn down, Superman is not only radically mobile, but also radically invulnerable. As such, the panopticism of the character's disruptivity becomes a mirror of the type of power it simultaneously makes redundant. Both Superman's disruptivity and the panopticon serve as coeval signs for one another, reflecting

the same idealization of power. Both present “a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction” (Foucault 205). As such, Superman's Other version of power is indistinguishable from terrestrial praxes of human power because their ideology is the same: to control, subjugate, discipline, and punish lives and bodies. Consider the following cover image:



Fig. xxxvi. taken from *Superman: Red Son* Vol. 1, No. 3 “Red Son Setting” (August, 2003) written by Mark Millar, illustrated by Dave Johnson. Cover.

Johnson's depiction of Superman makes the theme of surveillance and its subsequent paranoia clear. The image centralizes the penetrative nature of the character's Gaze by emphasizing its glowing eyes that not only meet and follow the reader's gaze, but are presented as being able to see through it thereby gesturing to and troubling the distinction between extradiegetic and diegetic worlds. The notion of absolute penetration is underscored by the image's accompanying text because in *Red Son*, Superman is not monitoring threats to individuals' personal liberty in the form of the subjective violence of both criminals and dissidents against its regime of total global domination. Instead, Superman's powers of surveillance are dedicated to monitoring and controlling of the general public. Dave Johnson's aesthetic – from the composition of Superman's face, the stark tricolour palette, the centralized Gaze, and the accompanying text buttressing the theme of surveillance – recalls Winston Smith's description of a poster of Big Brother on the first page of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949); “on each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran” (Orwell 3).

What can be concluded from reading Superman as an embodied panopticon? For one thing, there is a radical economy in the character's panopticism, one that the economy of a traditional panopticon cannot match. The traditional panopticon reduces the efficacy of its functioning to purely

architectural, optical, and geometric arrangements. In contrast, within the context of the numerous earths of the DC hyperdiegesis, Superman is able to travel at super-sonic and subluminal speeds, to hear clearly, and discreetly, over immense distances. It is also able to see through any substance (save lead) to the electromagnetic, and even the atomic level. In *Superman: Birthright* (2003), written by Mark Waid, illustrated by Leinel Francis Yu, Waid even posits that Superman is able to see the 'aura' surrounding all living things that dissipates and disappears at the moment death, described as a type of 'soul vision' (Waid 3; 22). The theme of Superman's penetrative Gaze is also inadvertently taken up in *Action Comics Vol. 2, No. 1* (November, 2011) "Superman Versus the City of Tomorrow" written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Rags Morales. In the story, one detective Blake, his officers, and a squad of tactical personal attempt to arrest Superman, resulting in a momentary stand-off. Superman uses its X-Ray vision to look inside Blake's stomach, flippantly cautioning, "you need to call your doctor about that ULCER, detective Blake. I can see it throbbing fit to BURST from here" (Morrison). This scene further highlights the invasive nature of Superman's Gaze as well as the fact with the possession of these powers of surveillance on a diegetic earth, the character's presence is always possible both on the smallest and largest levels of being. In conjunction with its superbrain, the character's ability to see into diegetic human hearts, veins, brains, or stomachs, and based on where and who the observed is with, allows it to collate data in such a way as to have accurate and penetrating insights into

human lives, health, habits, vices, and weaknesses. In view of the radical extent of the character's panoptic Gaze, there can be no diegetic privacy because one would never definitively know when one was being watched or how one was being watched by it. As such, its powers of observation contain a panopticism, willed or not, benevolent or not, that is as irreducible to its being as its Otherness or power. When compared to the architectural panopticon, the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness render the principle of panopticism more efficient in every way.



Fig. xxxvii. taken from *Superman: Red Son* Vol. 1, No. 3 “Red Son Setting” (August, 2003) written by Mark Millar, illustrated by Dave Johnson. p.g.106.

Consider Figure xxxvii. above Johnson's depiction of Superman concretizes the concept of Superman as an embodied panopticon as I have described it. From this image, one can conclude that Superman's Gaze is not theoretical or static in *Red Son*. Superman is shown to use its powers of surveillance to turn Earth, and all life therein, into an object of observation. While

it may use satellites and other devices like the reprogrammed Brainiac to collect, store, and process data, as the image shows, its Gaze is panoptic and embodied because Superman does not require any technological constituent to exercise its Gaze and deploy its perspective to oversee the planet. The above image effectively depicts how the efficacy of the panoptic gaze afforded the watchman in Bentham's panoptic tower is exploded, perfected, and embodied in Superman. Unlike the watchmen in the tower, who can only observe cross-sections of a populace at a time, Superman can simultaneously and consistently observe everyone in an entire diegetic solar should it wish or was compelled to. Regardless of however objectionable one may find such a realization, I argue that it is precisely the panopticism of its power that also facilitates its actions as a superhero. Through its powers of surveillance, Superman is able to perceive danger, hear, smell, see, and taste a fire, a mugging or an earthquake, for example, in such a way that allows it to react decisively in allaying said dangers and, in some instances, pre-empting them. However, its surveilling abilities are reducible to the same principles of panopticism and material praxes of totalizing power inherent in Bentham's panopticon. In that Superman's seeing into danger is inextricable from seeing into the lives and beings of those at risk of said danger. In this way, the anxiety over the character's omniscience and omnipresence is indivisible from its power and its activity as a superhero, whose task, ironically, is to allay fears, threats, and danger. There is a further irony that I do not have space or time here to fully discuss but feel it necessary to mention

here in brief. The nature of the medium and the process of experiencing it is panoptic and voyeuristic in nature. Like Superman, the reader can see into the lives (the narrative itself) and thoughts (speech bubbles, caption boxes, internal monologues etc.) while holding all objects of the Gaze, the characters, and their lives, discrete from one another. The format and sequential technique of comic book storytelling engenders this effect as the panels of the comic divide the narrative into distinct cells, much like the periphery ring of the Panopticon's watchtower, allowing the reader the power of being able to see, allowing total omniscience, without being seen in turn. In this sense, the medium equates Superman's powers of surveillance with those of the reader, each functioning through the panoptic mechanism described above. That said, Grant Morrison's *The Filth* and *Animal Man* Vol. 1, No. 26, 19, and most notably, No. 5 are particularly interesting examples of comics that are self-referentially aware of this attribute of experiencing the medium as an extradiegetic reader/viewer and the sequential storytelling method employed by the author.

While human being for the extradiegetic supervisor in a panoptic tower is visible, human being for Superman becomes transparent. Like the panopticon's second principle of power, namely the invisibility or unverifiability of the observer, Superman is able to dissimulate its power through the aesthetic apparatus known as Clark Kent that allows it to disappear amid the diegetic terrestrial and human milieu. By 'storing' its power in, underneath, beside, or behind Clark, the human beings of the DC hyperdiegesis can never

unequivocally know when or how they are being observed. The character's fractured identity makes verification of this power, its localization in a single, clear identity, impossible. The fragmentation inherent in Superman's tridentity becomes a means of “dissociating the see/being seen dyad” whereby being Superman/Clark means that the character can see totally without being totally seen in turn (Foucault 202).

A pervasive paranoia emerges as a result whereby diegetic human beings of any diegetic earth reflecting extradiegetic socio-political, cultural and historical reality now come to feel that they are potentially always being observed, not just by the State, but by Superman as the Eye of the State; one that is always threatening to spy out transgressions and express itself so as to correct, discipline, and punish such deviations from the morally and ethically determined norm as the Fist of the State. As such, Superman is, like Bentham's panoptic structure, both actively (as Superman) and passively (as Clark Kent) involved in the administration of bodies and lives. Being 'Clark Kent' or 'Superman' does not matter because the panoptic principle and the power of its functioning works both through presence and absence. While its credo of 'truth, justice, and the American Way' may be enough to appease a portion of the populace of Earth-0, I argue that the point is not the ways Millar shows Superman's Earth-30 self to be different from its conservative Americanist self in *Red Son*, but rather the ways in which they are the same. Ultimately, it does not matter how aesthetically or narratologically disparate the Supermen of the DC

Multiverse may be, be they socialist, jingoistic, or Nazi. 'Truth' and 'justice' cannot extenuate the fact that the idea of Superman is used as an ideological tool, weapon, and icon of the praxis of the superpowered administration of human lives and human bodies. As such, Superman, as a panoptic moral enforcer, becomes a potentially amenable strategy of human biopower as an alien technology of biopower. The idea that an extremely powerful alien exists in and amongst diegetic human being, affecting it both visibility and invisibly, produces an effect of panoptic paranoia in human beings on these Earths whereby

“he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes principle of his own subjugation” (Foucault 203).

While in *Superman/Batman* Vol. 1, No. 3 (2003), Batman notes that “it is a remarkable dichotomy. In many ways, Clark is the most human of us all. Then...he shoots fire from the skies, and it is difficult not to think of him as a god. And how fortunate we all are that it does not occur to him,” as noted in CHAPTER III, *Red Son* importantly also highlights the consequences of this realization in Superman within the context of the latent fascism of the character's power and Otherness (Loeb 2003). *Red Son* shows that with Superman, diegetic human beings ultimately become objects of information, never subjects in communication, as it is with the protagonist in Gibbon's and McKeever's

“Survivor,” whereby humanity’s inescapable visibility becomes a trap. In this way, “from the point of view of [Superman], [human being] is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised” (Foucault 201).

I concede that reading Superman as a panoptic figure does not necessarily call its status as a hero, as benevolent, or as altruistic into question. Instead, it means that one has to also consider the character as a voyeuristic State Eye or Gaze that cannot be fully seen in turn. The idea of disciplined bodies and disciplined lives both modulated and mediated by a simultaneously creative and prohibitive super-biopower begs the question of the possibility of resistance. I struggle to envisage the possibility of resistance against the diegetic power, body, and Otherness of a Superman who has turned all thought and effort toward the goal of exerting a maximal influence on being on Earth as shown in *Red Son*. In this sense, the panopticism of the character’s power ensures that “there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future...no disorders, no theft, no coalitions” (Foucault 201).

While the panopticism of its power and Otherness produces a fear of the character’s ability to observe and catalogue the human species, inherent in this fear is also the concern that Superman has the power to turn a diegetic earth into its own petri dish that is, its own experimental space. This theme can be noted in *Superman* Vol. 1, No. 174, “The End of a Hero Part II” (January, 1964) written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Al Plastino. In this pre-*Crisis* story,

Superman 'plays God' in the Frankensteinian style when it creates "a synthetic android" in its Fortress of Solitude, replete with "artificial nerves," that can think and feel, possess a mind, with consciousness and emotions and a "conscience factor." (Siegel 5-6). In disregarding the ethical codes and procedures governing such radical creativity, Superman "carries out whatever scientific experiments [it] wants, without regard for any ethical committees" due to the immunity its power and Otherness allow (Lloyd 190). As a result, the character's panopticism miniaturizes human being in its dialectical approach and appraisal thereof in the same way Brainiac does Kandor. The theme of miniaturization is used as a metaphor to describe the scales of power and the panoptic application of an omniscient Gaze against an entire population in *Red Son* No. 3. In one notable scene, Luthor pens a letter he knows Superman, with its panoptic Gaze, will be able to read. The letter states: "why don't you just put the whole world in a BOTTLE, Superman?" (Millar 136). Ultimately, one of the themes Miller's text centralizes is the idea that within the context of a diegetic earth, human agency is not applicable or actionable at Superman's level of being. As such, the character's disruptivity can be used as a total and devastating effect of biopower through which the concept of 'a world' and human being can be miniaturized, remade, and controlled. *Superman* No. 174 and *Red Son* also speak to the fear that with Superman, there is always the unsuppressed possibility that observation will become direct participation whereby an earth becomes its laboratory of power; a

“[m]achine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with machines [and various other apparatuses of control] and monitor their effects. To try out [alterations in being] to seek out the most effective ones. To teach different techniques simultaneously to [beings], to decide which is the best. To try out pedagogical experiments...One could bring up different children according to different systems of thought, making certain children believe that two and two do not make four or that the moon is a cheese, then put them together when they are twenty or twenty-five years old; one would then have discussions that would be worth a great deal more than the sermons or lectures on which so much money is spent; one would have at least an opportunity of making discoveries in the domain of metaphysics.”

(Foucault 204)

In view of my consideration of Superman's powers and the disciplinary and punitive use of said abilities, one exigent question comes to mind. If the character both consciously and unconsciously uses its power to subjugate and control all life on a diegetic earth, is there any, and I use the term broadly here, 'positive' application of the panopticism of its power? One possible answer to this question I propose refers back to CHAPTER III's exploration of the character's intercession in diegetic human affairs as a possible xenological First Contact scenario with potentially positive outcomes. While the panoptic aspects of the character's power evoke notions of the threat of tyranny exercised on a

diegetically global scale, a siege, or an invasion of an earth by a single superpowered being, there is also the possibility of establishing new flows and systems of being, co-existence and governance using the panopticism of its power as a technology of radical socio-political revaluation. What would be needed in this regard is that Superman's power “be exercised in the very foundations of society, in the subtlest possible way” (Foucault 208). In other words, whether tyrant, guardian, or messiah, what would be required in the wake of the diegetic panopticism of Superman's power is a fundamental revaluation of human being in these worlds. Inherent in such a project would be the development of new relations of power and human being to a new form of power. As *Red Son* deftly shows, Superman's mere existence on an earth would necessarily act as the catalytic agent of the re-evaluation of “the region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations” so as to analyse and reform their “distributions, gaps, series, combinations” by rendering them visible, recordable, and comparable (Foucault 208).

If Superman were to be truly successful in helping to reform the social bodies of diegetic human being and the power relations that affect and reproduce them – from political, judicial, ethical, metaphysical, scientific systems and onto-existential frames of self-reference – the outcome could generally be said to be one of either two things. First, if the revaluation of being on an earth would be catalysed by tyrannical or totalitarian means that endeavour to

decisively subordinate all human bodies, concrete and abstract, then such a world would not be able to function without Superman's panoptic presence acting as an axiom of being as issues one and two of *Red Son* show. Second, if the revaluation of being on an earth were catalysed by revolutionary means, that is, under the aegis of fundamentally and actively changing being on said earth so as to open up new ways of being, then Superman would act in such a way that would eventually dispense with the need for a Superman in such a world altogether.

My point here is that Superman's panopticism, like the design of the Panopticon itself, is not necessarily negative. Inherent in the panopticism of the character's power and Otherness is also the idea that it could use the disruptivity of its power, body, and Otherness as a creative xenotechnology and therefore use it to re-imagine life on a diegetic earth as opposed to suppressing it, threatening it or destroying it. As such, it is absolutely possible that Superman could use all the information it accrues regarding the human species in a comprehensive and transvaluative manner. It could use its panopticism to disseminate the most accurate scientific and philosophical genealogy of human being ever attempted or dreamt of. What is at stake here is the idea that Superman could use its position of being both within and without human being, and the surveillance abilities of both its Gaze and super-brain, to help reveal humanity to itself better than it ever has in its entire history as reproduced and represented in the DC hyperdiegesis. Such vision could change the way those

human beings understand the relationships and hierarchies of their powers, all their bodies (concrete and abstract) and the way they have evolved through time. While *Red Son* invites a reading of Superman and its power, body, and Otherness as a fulfilment or embodiment of such radical and transformative Possibility, the text ultimately concludes in the negative. By employing lobotomization of dissident elements of the human populace of Earth-30 to establish a top-down utopia in the denizens it literally and invasively controls completely undermines such utopian conclusions regarding the character's panopticism.

Within the diegesis of *Red Son*, this leaves the dystopian results of Superman's active enforcement of human ideology to be ironically resisted by the amoral genius of Lex Luthor, whose active resistance against the autocracy inherent in the panopticism of Superman's power and Otherness troubles the dialectical arrangement of hero (Superman) contra villain (Luthor). Luthor's letter is again important here because the only way to resist the adverse effects of both Superman's panopticism and its punitive use is to present the fact thereof in a way that transgresses any deferring capabilities its naiveté or ideological interpellation may offer. Luthor's caustically insightful letter is shown to be more effective than any weapon because it uses Superman's penetrative Gaze as a mirror against itself through which the character cannot help but recognize the fear and oppression its paradoxical existence as an alien moral champion/overseer on that earth produces. As such, Luthor's seemingly simple

letter creates a monumental psychic break within Superman by uncovering the aporia of the character, namely, having always-already changed that world by being in it, and yet using the disruptivity of its power, body, and Otherness to preserve an idealized version thereof. The success of Luthor's strategy is evidenced by the fact that after reading the letter, Superman breaks down, mortified by the recognition of its own existential crisis and the crisis its existence on that earth unavoidably presents to its humanity:

“OH MY GOD! What have I DONE? All I wanted was to put an end to all the WARS and FAMINES! I only wanted the BEST for everyone, you've got to BELIEVE me... [...] I'm just as bad as YOU were Brainiac. I'm just another alien bullying a less developed species and it's MORALLY UNJUSTIFIABLE” (Millar 136-7).

As such, *Red Son* presents the rivalry between Superman and its nemesis Luthor in a way that is less about the conflict between communism and capitalism, or moral probity and amoral turpitude. While the clash of these two ideologies is embodied by each character – the former becoming premier of the Soviet Union, the latter subsequently becoming the president of the United States – forms the narratological and aesthetic grounding of the story, Millar's text ultimately presents this antagonism as a human being's resistance against the panoptic power of a superbeing acting as overseer and oligarch of a diegetic earth.

Millar's text is important in drawing attention to the latently fascistic

aspects of the insolubly paradoxical nature of Superman's diegetic terrestrial experiences. Diegetically, Superman both is and acts outside the jurisdiction of the law. By acting beyond the purview of its mandate in the many earths of DC's hyperdiegesis, Superman effaces the very thing it serves namely, the law itself. As such, the character may be viewed as a vigilante. However, if one thinks of Superman in decidedly ideological terms, it is easy to read the character as an alien technology of biopower added to existing diegetic representations of human apparatuses of power – subtly, as Clark, spectacularly as Superman – increasing their strength by being paradoxically within them from outside. In actual fact, Superman is able to enforce the law in ways feared and coveted by the punitive and judicial apparatuses of the human State of a diegetic earth. In short, Superman, as an alien tributary of the diegetic State, increases both the efficiency and efficacy of the State and its ability to monitor and police its polis. This is not simply limited to judicial concerns, though that is the area of society in which the character, as both Superman and Clark, most prominently deploys the disruptivity of its power and Otherness. Superman's investment in the protection and reproduction of the diegetic representations of the State and its apparatuses maximizes the repressive and ideological power of the State it serves in these worlds, becoming the embodied perfection of the State's telos of austere government, regardless of whether it socialist or capitalist be definition. In its publication history, the character typically elects not to get embroiled in any domestic or foreign policy, the drafting of new bills, taxes, reforms and so on.

However, while it may not be intentionally political or politically active, it is, without a doubt, a political tool and a symbol whose actions are inevitably politicized, both extradiegetically and diegetically. As Lloyd points out, even “by trying to insulate himself from ideologies, Superman has become an ideologue. By limiting himself to small horizons, and his idiosyncratic, reactive stance, he defines himself by an abstract rule – namely the ideology of small-town thinking” (Lloyd 195).

If diegetic humanity were to abdicate all governance to Superman and its vast range of power as *Red Son* shows, there are unavoidable questions to be asked; from the socio-political, economic, and philosophical standing of preceding forms of government, to the question of “how will [its] power [...] be able to increase those of society [and human being more generally] instead of confiscating them or impeding them?” (Foucault 208). One possible answer that can be derived from the conclusion of *Red Son* is that it does not matter which self-assuredly humanistic ideology the character defends, reproduces or enforces. Due to the scale of its power within the contexts of DC Comics’ numerous diegetic earths, the results are always latently fascistic, suggesting that within the shadow of its cape is the idea that it is an impediment and confiscation of diegetic human agency. In this sense, *Red Son* is important because it effectively draws out and robustly explores the various conclusions to be drawn from Fingerioth’s questions concerning the tension between the concept of the comic book superhero and the idea of ‘friendly-fascism.’

*CRITIQUE OF THE LATENT FASCISM OF COMIC BOOK SUPERHEROES:
MARSHAL LAW*

There are other non-mainstream comics that parody, satirize and overtly critique the concept of the comic book superhero/costumed crime fighter, particular as diegetic representations of fantasies of superpower and dehumanizing alien forces of subversion. Two non-mainstream comic book examples in particular, like Miller, similarly explore the latent fascism of superpowered intervention in diegetic human affairs, whose ethic can be described as being based on exposure, revelation, parody and critique. One is *The Boys* (2012) written by Garth Ennis and illustrated by Darick Robertson, and the other is *Marshal Law* (1987) written by Pat Mills, illustrated by Kevin O'Neill. *Marshal Law: Fear and Loathing* (October 1987), originally published under Epic Comics as a six-issue miniseries, the follow-up series titled *Marshal Law Takes Manhattan* (1989), featured extensive parodies of numerous Marvel Comics characters. As Ennis himself would come to later acknowledge, Mills and O'Neill's work on *Marshal Law* would come to influence the tone and satirical aptitude of superhero comics as meta-fiction, that is, both able and suitable for the self-reflexive critique of the genre's founding premises and principles. When asked about the origin of *Marshal Law* in "Q&A: Writer Pat Mills on 25+ years of superhero hunting with 'MARSHAL LAW'" in *Books/Art/Culture, Features/Interviews, News* (2013) by Sean Hogan, Mill's states that the narrative

followed the aesthetic in that

“[MARSHAL LAW artist] Kevin O’Neill came up with this amazing looking future cop and we then searched for a story for him. Initially we trod the MAD MAX road. Then, I had a plot about future crime in a TOUCH OF EVIL world. We sold this to Marvel. But then I felt that the guy really was some kind of superhero and the story should reflect this. But I hated superheroes! So I thought: What about making him a superhero hunter, where I could vent my spleen on them, a story I am supremely qualified to write. I tentatively suggested this to Kevin who added a future war context and we were away.” (Hogan 2013)

The primary narrative in *Fear and Loathing* concerns Law's attempt to build a case against the Public Spirit for the murder of Virago and the surrounding, albeit related crimes, portrayed as a series of rapes and murders attributed to The Sleepman. In many ways, the title of the first arc of *Marshal Law*, namely *Fear and Loathing*, is an apt synopsis of the ethos and provenance of the themes, narrative, and aesthetic approach to the text. In essence, Mills indicts the concept of mainstream superhero comics as agents of ideological agendas of latent violence, amorality disguised as altruism, and nihilism disguised as a sort of truncated, naïve, and narrow optimistic humanism. Through the narrative and aesthetics of the text, Mills and O’Neill suggest that the latent truth of the concept of the comic book superhero is the total inverse of their typified association with “goodness”, broadly speaking, seeing them instead

as being ardent and entrenched agents, as well as particularly suitable targets, of both fear and loathing. The passion with which he pursues this mission is predicated on the fact that Law hates the Public Spirit for his complicity in encouraging otherwise ordinary people in the diegetic world of San Futuro to fight in the Zone, indirectly causing the deaths of thousands of soldiers and their psycho-physical trauma as the victims of the transhumanist and extropian ethos of Dr. Shocc's radical experimental procedures, intended to make them efficient, fearless, and painless killers. As Kiernan Cashell and John Scaggs suggest in their essay "Transvestite Logic: Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill's *Marshall Law* and the Superhero Genre" (2005), being that Law volunteered for the war as a young man, enthralled by the encouragements of the Public Spirit like so many others, and who like them became a victim to Dr. Shocc's treatments and their subsequent traumas compounded by the post-traumatic stress disorders of the Zone conflict, "his pathological hatred of the Public Spirit is the result of classic ambivalence: his desire to emulate his super-ego role model is inverted into the transverse desire to annihilate that ideal when he discerns the abject reality behind its mythological surface" (Cashell and Scaggs 19). As such, the violent and unstable characters that populate Mills and O'Neill's diegesis are, in part, victims of an extropian goal co-opted by the military industrial complex of the State (Mills & O'Neill 12). While the world of Miller's *Red Son* develops into a paradoxical fascistic utopia under Superman's absolute rule, the inverse is true in *Marshall Law*. The world of San Futuro is a dystopia populated, terrorized and

policed by veterans of the Zone; surplus heroes or 'surps' with artificially created powers of radical physiological proficiency and aggression albeit with no conflict within which to discharge them. These individuals coalesce into gangs of psychotic surplus superheroes who claim parts of the city for themselves, resulting in anarchic superpowered turf wars.

In Vol. 1, No. 6, Law states in an inner monologue: "I had been inspired by the Public Spirit...He was always my special hero...He could take any amount of punishment and hand it out. Never for evil...He was like the heroes in comic books. Forever young. I was five when I was first told about the dream, twenty-nine when I knew he and his kind had stolen it" (Mills and O'Neill 16-21). These private speculations and critiques lead Law to question the meaning of being a superhero in the same issue, stating that being a superhero is to debase "the MEANING of the word: 'a person distinguished by exceptional courage, nobility, and fortitude,'" further inquiring "how much COURAGE does it take to fly through the air? How much NOBILITY to use your super powers on ordinary people?" (Mills and O'Neill 4). In this way, Law bears similarities to Miller's portrayal of the character Batmankov, who expresses a similar hatred/suspicion of Superman predicated on similar reasons.

The theme of institutional complicity in obfuscating the latent corruption of the superhero takes the form of Commissioner McGland in *Marshal Law*. When presenting his case against The Public Spirit to the Commissioner in Vol. 1, No. 3 (1987) "Superhero Messiah," McGland attempts to disingenuously dissuade

Law from pursuing his case by appealing to the character's patriotism, and his ostensibly concealed belief in the ideal of the comic book superhero. In an internal monologue, McGland states that

“He makes his point (at considerable length) ...and I pretend I am interested. How do I answer his serious allegations about The Public Spirit? It's very simple. I lie. I tell him colonel Caine is under investigation...but no action is being taken until after the wedding [to his partner Celeste]. I explain about the scandal. And appeal to his patriotism...He always had that one big weakness – even in the zone. He still believes in the dream. That's why he hates the Public Spirit. Because he thinks he's betrayed the dream” (Mills and O'Neill 21-23).

In view of the fact that the character takes great pleasure in exerting maximal force in the execution of his duties, Law can be read as both an avatar and confession of Mills' deeply antithetical position toward the mainstream portrayals of the concept of the comic book superhero. When asked by Hogan to comment on his deep and abiding loathing for comic book superheroes, and their ostensible self-awareness in contemporary comic book film adaptations such as Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) and Joss Whedon's *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012), Mills states that contemporary conceptualizations and understandings of superheroes

“seem more self aware and pretentious now, but the 21st century so far is hardly a time of creative progress. I read some highly-rated Superman

origins book by Grant Morrison a couple of years back, expecting some new Scottish insights into the character and was surprised by how deferential it was. Well, I guess that's what the fans want. Don't blame us. If they want the forelock tugging approach it only reflects the wider world. My loathing is more for what they represent—nothing wrong with a hero with special powers, if he isn't just a tool of the establishment. So I did an Indian super hero once—BLACK SIDDHA—who originally didn't want to be a hero (like they do). He said, "I can't be a superhero. I'm not American." Well, it amused me!" (Hogan 2013)

Mills and O'Neill have elaborated on the relationship between the impetus, themes and aesthetic of *Marshal Law* in numerous other interviews as well. In an interview for "Gosh! Comics: Pat Mills & Kevin O'Neill Discuss Marshal Law" (2013), Mills states that the comic has elements of satire and pastiche, but was not initially intended to critique a specific character. Instead, their target was the superhero type, the concept of the comic book superhero, and more precisely, the values that they represent. In the same interview, O'Neill later goes on to state that the comic was well received by British readers, but quite strongly reviled by American industry professionals (Gosh! 2013).

Law's secret identity, Joe Gilmore, former supersoldier of the stories defining conflict, the South American Zone War, offers Mills another avenue to critique and parody the concept of the superhero/costumed crime fighter. Gilmore (Law) is portrayed as being deeply consumed with an unassuaged self-

hatred over being a superhero or, at least, superpowered. Law's anger at being superpowered, mutated, manipulated and violated is compounded by the fact that Law is a symbol of further oppression as an agent of the state, a "fascist cop" or "glorified Nazi" as he describes himself in Vol. 1, No. 4 (Mills and O'Neil 10-11). Like Ennis's *Boys* to follow, superpowered individuals proliferate in Mills and O'Neills' narrative due to the bio-chemical manipulations of government and military-industrial complexes overseen by one Dr. Shocc. Being a parody of the idea of the supersoldier popularized by mainstream characters such as Captain America (Steve Rogers), Mills inverts the mainstream connotation of the nationalistic and patriotic value of substances like supersoldier serums, instead characterizing the artificially enhanced individuals in the diegesis of *Marshal Law* as unstable victims of the American military-industrial complex. This can be noted in fact that the superpowered individuals in *Marshall Law* do not feel pain as result of their genetic enhancements. As such, the majority of the United States armed forces who had undergone the process for and during the Zone conflict have superpowered bodies, whilst their minds remain unchanged. While this results in some individuals coming to possess unmanageable superpowers, Mills characterizes the possession of superpower as a form of psychosis whereby many of these individuals compensate for their unhinged and painless dispositions by seeking to inflict pain on others.

Law's primary antagonists in the first six-issue miniseries, namely The Sleepman and The Public Spirit, are especially potent examples of Mills' satire

and critique. In an inner monologue in Vol. 1, No. 5 (1987) “Mark of Caine”, The Sleepman sums up his similarity to Law, stating “in many ways we're the same...we're heroes too and hate ourselves for it” (Mills 4). As such, hatred, confusion, pathological repression, psycho-physical instability, addiction and violence are what Mills and O'Neill suggest are the true or latent aspects of what it means to be a comic book superhero. Cashell and Scaggs also suggest that within the diegesis of *Marshal Law*, The Public Spirit “is designed to represent the genre: he is meant to be the prototypical superhero” in this way (Cashell and Scaggs 10).

While the series can be read as a procedural, Law's attempts to uncover the conspiracy at the heart of the concept of the comic book superhero as represented and embodied by the Public Spirit (much in the same way as Miller's Batmankov), the character's ethos and telos are both essentially based on a will to exposure and revelation, with ardent self-reflexive critique, parody and satire along the way. Mills elaborates on this theme of exposure and demystification regarding his approach to the superhero ideal's latent corruption of mythological and religious ideals, stating that he thinks that “the deification of superheroes is rather worrying. The neo-Christian elements, e.g. Messiah Syndrome, have been written about before, although not in a critical way to my knowledge. Abdicating our power to messiahs is a dangerous business” (Hogan 2013).

Mills and O'Neill achieve this exposure and critique in both obvious and subtle ways. The latter notion of demystification and obfuscation can be noted in

Vol. 1, No. 6 (1987) “Nemesis” which features a series of bubble-gum cards. Each card depicts the Public Spirit involved in what can be described as quintessential superheroic activities of ostensible altruism, from the extraordinary to the mundane. Beneath each card reads a caption title: “No More Slums,” “Conquering to Stars,” “Rescuing a Nun,” “Rescuing a Dog,” “Rescuing an Orphan” and a final card that describes this example of both product placement and a redux of an idealized version of the character's history metaphorically gobbled up by the diegetic public that reads “A Job Well Done” (Mills and O'Neill 14). However, these cards serve to also “constitute an elliptic representation of the clichéd mythos of the superhero” whereby, as Lynn (Gilmore's girlfriend) notes in her own diegetic thesis about the superheroes of her world, that “the Public Spirit cards, painted in bright optimistic primary colours, make his feats seem easy and attractive to children. There is no attempt at realism” (Cashell and Scaggs 16). That said, through Law, Mills and O'Neill seek to demystify the latent truths and tensions behind the comic book superhero's power obfuscated by such ideological imperative, and their often problematic engagement with morality, ethics and law.

Like the foundations of Superman's world peace in Miller's *Red Son* being predicated on the obfuscation of such morally and legally suspect practices such as lobotomization and the overall fascistic approach the character has toward the idea of world peace through violence and force, the ethic of exposure in *Marshal Law* is most obviously dealt with in Law's mission to expose The Public

Spirit as a murderer. On the Public Spirit's return from an extended space mission (which occurs near to the speed of light and therefore has relativistic effects in terms of the character's age relative to those he leaves behind on that earth), the Public Spirit holds a press conference. Law interrupts the public adoration of the Public Spirit, accusing him of murder. The incident in question occurs in the stories pre-history and involves the accusation that The Public Spirit murdered his then partner Virago, another superhero, prior to his space mission. While official reports cite her death as an accidental drowning at sea during a storm, the grounds Law offers accuse the Public Spirit of murdering Virago; the motive being that Virago was pregnant with the Public Spirit's child at the time and, as a result, compromised the Public Spirit's ability to leave for deep space without being accused of abandoning his partner and then unborn child. Law finds it extremely suspicious that the greatest hero of the *Marshal Law* diegesis would be unable to successfully execute what would be for him a simple sea rescue. As such, in Vol. 1, No. 2 (1987) "Evolution", Law hypothesizes that the Public Spirit murdered Virago to protect his careerist ambitions, being keenly aware that Virago would have aged twenty-five years during his mission, therefore beating her to death at sea instead having to navigate the complex consequences and circumstances of her pregnancy (Mills and O'Neill 16-18). As such, the irony here is that the Public Spirit's attempt to pursue its career as a superhero involves the villainous murder of his partner and unborn child, thereby negating his status as a laudable superhero. Like

Ennis's critique of the superhero in *The Boys*, Mills similarly suggests that the underlying use of superpower is entirely self-interested and does not hesitate to transgress moral and legal strictures in its pursuit of material and cultural gain. As Cashell and Scaggs note, "the public Spirit becomes overt hero and covert villain in one character; he undermines the convention of the superhero with one murderous act" and as such, Law's admonition and hatred of the Public Spirit is also based on his perceived violation and perversion of the typical convention that a superhero is inherently benevolent and altruistic (Cashell and Scaggs 19).

Cashell and Scaggs note that scholarly attention toward Mill's and O'Neill's text is sparse. The reason they conjecture is that "perhaps this is due to its implacably negative attitude towards the genre, which (especially in the later series) approaches the nihilistic" or that

"perhaps it was tempting for readers to dismiss it along nationalistic line as a British intervention into an originally and traditionally but far from exclusively American genre; and indeed, for the creators of *Marshal Law* a critique of the superhero necessarily involves a political critique of American society" (Cashell and Scaggs 9).

I conjecture that this might be in part because *Marshall Law* is distinguished from other revisionist strategies that proliferated in the 1980s concerning the deconstructive and self-reflexive critique of the comic book superhero detailed toward the conclusion of CHAPTER II above. As Cashell and Scaggs rightly note, Mills and O'Neills' satirical and nihilistic approach is

“not so genuinely concerned with the superhero genre as to desire to question its fantastical (or psychologically suspect) bases by developing new textual strategies influenced by cinematic devices (thereby fortifying the genre at a higher level). Nor are the authors of *Marshal Law* particularly interested in rehabilitating a genre reaching exhaustion by providing complex and emotionally involving narratives for a mature and knowledgeable audience that requires its fictional interactions to have a contextual (i.e., socio-psychological and historically genre-referential) sophistication. In opposition to these re-evaluation and rehabilitation strategies, Mills and O'Neill seem more intent on precipitating the termination of what is obviously (to them, at least) an incapacitated framework. The political agenda played out in the storyline of *Fear and Loathing* therefore effects a rhetorical agenda: anti-superhero *Marshal Law*'s objective to forcibly reveal the private reality behind the fraudulent Public Spirit initiates an investigative exposure of the entire genre.”

(Cashell and Scaggs 10)

As such, the deconstructive ethic inherent in *Marshal Law*'s narrative and aesthetic is based on the dyad of concealment and revelation. On the one hand, the aesthetic of the comic is reminiscent of the hypertrophic violence and intensity of the decade in which it was created. This can be noted in the appearance of the text's eponymous protagonist. O'Neill aesthetic employed in the illustration of both *Law* and the dystopian world of San Futuro, by extension,

can be described as a cross between a Nazi SS field commander, biker, BDSM enthusiast and post-apocalyptic road warrior. He is muscular, wears crimson barbed wire wrapped around his right arm, spurred leather cowboy boots and tight fitting leather trousers, leather jacket (adorned with slogans such as “Fear and Loathing” arranged around American national colours within angular star motifs), a black and crimson gimp mask, and a military forage cap. As such, aesthetically, the character could easily be seen to inhabit the same diegesis as Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* (1992), for example. However, beneath this ostensible correspondence to superhero comics of the decade and soon thereafter, “this appearance is accompanied by the awareness that the text is a complete aberration – an obscene pastiche – of the genre” (Cashell and Scaggs 11), O'Neill's aesthetic for the Public Spirit, however, as physically robust, blond and blue eyed, centralizes the latent fascism of the concept of the comic book superhero by portraying the character as an aesthetic embodiment of the Nazi ideal. Within the remit of this aesthetic configuration, Cashell and Scaggs also note that “Mills and O'Neill have obviously plagiarized Superman (“standing for truth, justice and the American way”), the prototypical superhero (who remains the paradigm case)”, parodying Superman by suggesting that the latent fascism of comic book superbeings means that the Nazi Superman of Earth-10 represents the true latent content of the superhero ideal the character's other Multiverse iterations merely obscure/defer (Cashell and Scaggs 14). That said, perhaps the most interesting aspect of Mills and O'Neills' text, beyond their

astute and deft handling of their uncompromising parody and critique of the concept of the comic book superhero, is the text's complex negotiation and relationship with the very material it endeavours to invert, core, and expose. Much like the conundrum faced by alien being in a diegetic world that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, historical, and cultural reality in terms of using its disruptivity to fundamentally change it, Marshal Law's attempt to "subvert the salient laws of the genre, cannot do so effectively without at the same time adapting to those laws" (Cashell and Scaggs 12).

*MORAL AND ETHICAL BANKRUPTCY OF COMIC BOOK SUPERHEROES:
THE BOYS*

The Boys (October 2006-November 2012), is a creator-owned comic series created by writer Garth Ennis and illustrator Darick Robertson. The series was published by both Wildstorm (issues 1-6) and Dynamite Entertainment (7-72) and ran for 72 issues. The series can be described as being broadly anti-superheroic and as such, can be read as an extended meditation, satire, parody and critique of the concept of the comic book superhero/superbeing. In an interview for *The Comic Collective* (2007), Ennis offers a summation of the ethos and goals regarding his approach to the concept of the comic book superhero/costumed crime-fighter in *The Boys*, stating that

“if I could sum up the book's approach to superheroes, and this not unusual concept, it's an attempt to look at what they'd be like in the real world. Now, my particular line on that is that they would be a cross between politicians, who have an actual effect on our world, and pop culture celebrities, who are well known, instantly recognizable, and followed. Their lives are actually followed almost like a soap opera in the same way as actual actors and pop stars' lives are followed in the real world.” (Ennis 2007)

Much of the thematic focus in *The Boys* takes up similar themes that predicate other notable, albeit more mainstream examinations of the same type. Ennis's

attitude toward superheroes in *The Boys* can be described as a reaction against the genre, but more specifically, at its industrial stagnation. In an interview for *Sci Fi Now* by James Hoare titled “WHY GARTH ENNIS HATES SUPERHEROES AND LOVES WAR: Garth Ennis talks superhero comics, The Shadow, Nick Fury and why he loves World War 2” (2012), Ennis states that he finds

“most superhero stories completely meaningless [...] which is not to say I don’t think there’s potential for the genre – Alan Moore and Warren Ellis have both done interesting work with the notion of what it might be like to be and think beyond human, see *Miracleman*, *Watchmen* and *Supergods*. But so long as the industry is geared towards fulfilling audience demand – i.e., for the same brightly coloured characters doing the same thing forever – you’re never going to see any real growth. The stories can’t end, so they’ll never mean anything.” (Ennis 2012)

In the same interview, Ennis clearly states the influence of other non-mainstream critiques, satires, and pastiches of the concept of the comic book superhero. He states that

“The books which I’d say had the most influence on *The Boys* were *Watchman*, most obviously, and *Marshal Law*. Pat Mills, who wrote *Marshal Law*, loathes and despises superheroes. And that particular venom drips from every page of *M.L.* I think it’s a great book, it’s a lot of fun. I don’t hate superheroes. I just think they’re kind of silly. But like Pat, I

find the sillier aspects of them kinda fascinating. And combining that with my suspicions about what people like that would really be like, that really was my starting point for the way they're portrayed in *The Boys*. And [with] *Watchmen*, you have a much more nostalgic look at superheroes. In that book, you see that there's only one superpowered character and that's Dr. Manhattan. He's had a genuine effect on the world. The rest are, I think as Dr. Manhattan describes them at one point, friendly middle-aged men who like to dress up. So, that's an influence too. A being so powerful that he has an effect on society, on culture, on technology, on everything." (Ennis 2007)

What differentiates Ennis and Robertsons' critique of comic book superheroes is that *The Boys* examination of the violence and sexual malpractice of comic book superheroes, which Moore treats as latent, obscured, or secretive in the aforementioned texts, is brought to the foreground of the narrative and its aesthetic presentation. As such, the ethos of *The Boys*' critique of comic book superheroes can be described as two-fold, namely exposure and critique. The narrative is set in a world in which superheroes exist. However, unlike the hyperdiegeses of mainstream publishers like Marvel and DC Comics, the diegetic world of *The Boys* Ennis and Robertson create inverts what could be described as the quintessential logic of mainstream superhero comics' narratives and aesthetics that seek to celebrate and glorify the concept of the superhero, their problematic socio-political and cultural violence, and the often

opaque or overtly immoral use of power. As such, the series features a range of superhero parodies, ranging from the world's premier super-team called The Seven, a parody of mainstream superhero teams such as DC's Justice League and Marvel's Avengers. Instead of being a collaborative unit with the sole intent of safeguarding and protecting the human lives of that diegetic earth, they are portrayed as a capitalist conglomerate of corrupt, reckless, self-interested celebrities who regularly engage in morally opprobrious behaviour ranging from sexual and physical violence, including attempted rape, blackmail, and drug abuse. As such, Ennis's satire of the quintessential comic book superhero suggests that individuals of this type, or individuals who possess powers and abilities of the type they do within the context of a diegetic earth that reflects extradiegetic socio-political, historical, and cultural realities, would, ironically, behave in such a way as to compromise the safety of such a world and its inhabitants as opposed to safeguarding it.

If read as a critique of the superhero genre and its stagnation due to industrial standards and creative ethic that encourages circuitous re-productions of unchanging ideals, then Ennis *The Boys* is aimed directly, and aggressively, against the superhero genre itself. Using DC and Marvel comics traditions, Ennis's diegesis, like that of Mills and O'Neil, ostensibly resembles the aforementioned mainstream comic book worlds and their narrative and aesthetic conventions. However, within the context of the numerous occasions of blackmail, extortion, sexual abuse, and violence, it is clear that *The Boys* is as

revisionary as it is satirical or critical. For example, while a scene featuring the conservative Christian character Annie January's (also known as Starlight) attempt to join the prestigious superhero group The Seven (a clear pastiche of DC's Justice League) involving her being coerced into performing oral sex on three of its male members could be read as a misogynistic and tasteless wish-fulfilment fantasy, one can also argue that said scene should be read more as an uncompromising commentary on the unrealistic asexuality and fundamentalist morality of the diegetic climate mainstream characters like Superman and The Flash inhabit in the DC hyperdiegeis. As such, The Seven, as a critique of the mainstream representation of the comic book superhero ideal, are portrayed in a way intended to generate discomfort, anger, disgust, and measurable contempt in the reader. It is no surprise, then, that Ennis describes The Seven as being "very much superhero archetypes" and that as such, "they are scum" (Ennis 2007).

In terms of the text's scholarly interpretation, in his essay "Signals from Airship One: The British Invasion of Mainstream American Comics" featured in Paul Williams and James Lyons' edited *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts* (2010), Chris Murray describes *The Boys* as a showcase of Ennis's distaste for superheroes in his text. According to Murray,

"the comic features characters that seem drawn from the British comics of Ennis's childhood, such as Dennis the Menace and Oor Wullie from DC Thomson, who are dedicated to destroying the superheroes who threaten

to dominate the world with their arrogance and vanity [...] it is difficult not to read [the series] in terms of a critique of the dominance of American superhero comics over the British comics industry, and a break with [Grant Morrison's] love affair with the superhero genre" and that "if Moore half-seriously proclaimed his hatred of superheroes, then Ennis really did – with a passion" (Murray 42).

Similarly, in *Portraying 9/11: Essays on Representations in Comics, Literature, Film and Theatre* (2011) edited by Veronique Bragard, Christophe Dony and Warren Rosenberg, Mathew J. Costello's "Spandex Agonistes: Superhero Comics Confront the War on Terror" elaborates on Ennis's use of *The Boys* as a means of exposing what could be described as a conspiracy at the heart of the concept of the comic book superhero and its mainstream presentation and consumption. Costello suggests that the series "extends notions of government culpability to a conspiracy involving government, corporations, and superheroes" (Costello 38). He further elaborates that the interventionist nature of *The Boys* team, namely between superheroes and humans when the former is deemed to be acting excessively, "the need for *The Boys* stems from the hubris of superheroes, who act with no regard for civilian damage (the first issue open with a gruesome killing of an innocent bystander by a superhero chasing a super villain)" (Costello 39). The underlying idea here is that unlike the excessive powers held by mainstream superhero characters like Superman, or even less mainstream character's like Miracleman, whose abilities

are shown to have utopian and dystopian resonances, Ennis characterizes the hubris and accompanying moral, ethical, socio-political, cultural and infrastructural decay in the world of *The Boys* is a direct reflection or manifestation of an excess of power, particularly American power. As Costello notes, “identifying clearly which nation acts hubristically, the boys are French, English, Irish and Scottish, while the superheroes in this book are [overwhelmingly] Americans, created, funded, and directed by a giant American corporate conglomerate, Vought-American” (Costello 39). While Superman, for example, has been read at various times as the iconic exemplar of American moral and military might or simply as a successful American immigrant and symbol of perfect assimilation into the socio-political and cultural fabric of American values, Ennis's texts implicates America in its critique of what is typically regarded as an American idea, namely the concept of the comic book superhero itself. This is primarily achieved through Vought-American's quest for global domination and a hyperextension of its socio-political and economic power. As such, being tied to sectors of the U.S government, “the hubris of the American government here extends to corporations and the superheroes” (Costello 39). While the machinations of Vought-American (homophonic of “vote American”) are largely characterized as clandestine and conspiratorial throughout the series, the process of exposure and critique of superheroes' culpability in the socio-political and cultural excesses and errors of global governments is centralized in *The Boys* spin-off mini-series *Herogasm* (2009).

This text focusses almost exclusively on the superheroes of the world of *The Boys*, foregrounding their excessive behaviours and moral indiscretions. Ennis achieves this by framing the entire narrative within a week-long exclusively superhero-only orgy of sex and drugs. In the text, “the 9/11 attacks are explicitly identified as a product of the U.S government and military contractors who facilitate the 9/11 attacks to create a climate of fear which will further these ends” (Costello 29). The conspiracy is shown to be in part orchestrated by the Vice President, who is revealed to be a Vought-American underling. Another example of both this critical approach of exposure, which simultaneously exposes the corrupt private lives of extremely powerful individuals whilst allowing the reader a voyeuristic insight into what it is the possession of radical power and radical impunity allow one to do, can be seen in the story's first arc which involves the team's attempt to expose and therefore destroy the teenage superhero group Teenage Kix. When the text's protagonist Wee Hughie is on surveillance duty, he watches in disbelief as the young superhero group indulges in orgies, sadomasochism, drug use and self-harm. In this way, Ennis uses concepts and situations of realism to facilitate both his speculation and exposure of the latent hypocrisy of mainstream superhero comic books and the ideals they uphold in their respective diegetic worlds.

In the series, the eponymous group *The Boys*, a CIA sanctioned team of superpowered individuals, are tasked with the monitoring, and in some instances murder, of members of the superhero community of the story. The

team is lead by the seemingly morally bankrupt Billy Butcher. The rest of the group is comprised of members including The Frenchman, a hyperviolent mad scientist with Romantic sentiments, and The Female, a silent Japanese psychopath who is characterized as being physically the most dangerous member of the team. Despite the team's seemingly callous, or at least complicated morality, Mother's Milk, an African-American single father, is portrayed as the group's voice of reason and sense of sobriety. The newest recruit, who acts as a reader identification character and protagonist of the narrative, is Scotsman Wee Hughie. Hughie is recruited following the gruesome and senseless death of his girlfriend at the hands of A-Train, newest recruit of The Seven. Over the course of the narrative, Butcher subtly manipulates Hughie's sense of anger and pain over his loss, using his personal tragedy as leverage to inculcate a sense of constant awareness at what superheroes of Ennis's diegesis are capable of and why they need to be monitored or killed, if need be. In issue No. 1, "The Name of the Game" (2009), Butcher states that

"superpower's the most dangerous power on earth. There's more an' more of 'em all the time, an' sooner or later they're gonna wise up. If you can swim across the sun, you've better things to do with your life than save the world for the two hundredth time. One day, you might twig what you're really invulnerable to your humanity. An' then god help us all."

(Ennis 16).

This sentiment is compounded in the same issue, where Butcher vocalizes his

rebuke of superheroes in an attempt to manipulate Hughie to join the team, stating that he despises their “arrogance, that fuckin’ DISDAIN they have for us, where our lives mean nothin; more than a rat’s. Our deaths are barely an embarrassment. An’ all they do is walk away” (Ennis 16).

While the Butcher’s above summation provides a clear and succinct description of the perceived problem of the existence of radically powerful superbeings within the diegeses of superhero comic books, Ennis’s critical attitude toward superheroes also manifests as a critique against the role of superhero comics themselves in *The Boys’* diegesis through the character The Legend. Ennis describes The Legend as “the guy who when the superheroes first appeared and it was deemed necessary to publish to give them a kind of public face, it was deemed necessary to publish comic books as a sanitized version of what they actually got up to” (Ennis 2007). In essence, The Legend is a propagandist for the superheroes of Ennis’s world, but also a source of intelligence. In Vol. 1, No. 5 “Life Among the Sepctics” (2009), The Legend states, that during his time as a former employee of the text’s representation of the nefarious connection between superheroes and the American military-industrial complex in the form of Vought-American, working as a superhero propagandist using superhero comic books as a primary method of propagandistic dissemination, he states,

“I gave folks supes like they WANTED supes to be. Gave ‘em the adventure an’ Romance that lived up to the IMAGE” and that “No one

wants their HEROES sleazy an' fucked-up..so you feed 'em a DREAM. An' they'll buy T-Shirts an' watch the T.V shows, which is where the real money is, by the way, an' the LAST THING they'll do is try looking' any FURTHER.” (Ennis 12)

As such, *The Boys* suggest that comic book superheroes are, ultimately, agents of stagnation and decay. As with *Marshal Law*, this critique is predicated on the tension between the ostensible appearance and latent reality that status quo superheroes represent, and reproduce through their defence thereof. This can be noted when The Legend asks Hughie,

“why does ANYONE obey the law? So society stays the way it is. 'Cause that's what makes the most folks COMFORTABLE. An' it's the same for supes...Rulin' the world'd would be a MOTHERFUCKER, 'specially next to enjoyin' the fruits of bein' powerful in it JUST THE WAY IT IS. That's why there's more supe HEROES than supe VILLAINS...Because they know a GOOD GODDAMN THING when they see it” (Ennis 24).

Much like Mills and O'Neill's critique of the Public Spirit in *Marshal Law*, one of the ways Ennis goes about critiquing the type of ultra-conservative moral and ideological ethic that has come to be associated with characters like Superman, is through his critique and portrayal of the leader of The Seven named the Homelander. In Vol. 1, No. 5 “Life Among the Sepctics” (2009), The Legend describes him to Hughie:

“Vought have taught HIM well, an' he's a willin' pupil. He gets that smile

JUST RIGHT...an' when he SPEAKS, shit, all bets are OFF. He's HUMBLE, so he doesn't intimidate the men. He's INVULNERABLE, so the women get to add a little romance to their FUCK-FANTASIES. The RIGHT like him 'cause he's powerful an' he's OURS. The LEFT like him 'cause he's smart an' he's got a sense of humour, so at least this walkin' goddamn bomb is HUMAN." (Ennis 21)

As such, regardless of whether such characters appear within the concept of a diegetic dystopia or not, not only is the Homelander, like The Public Spirit, a false leader whose ostensibly perfect and excessive outward altruism and gravitas is a performative method to obfuscate the imperfect, corrosive and opprobriously excessive self-interestedness each character harbours, but each character is also a bio-chemically engineered/enhanced tool of the State's military-industrial complexes and their numerous capitalist agendas. As with Mills and O'Neills' depiction of the origin of the superheroes' superpowers in the *Marshal Law* diegesis, the superpowered origins of the Homelander and, by extension, The Seven, is also a parody of mainstream comic's co-opting of extropian and transhumanist ideals for the military-industrial complex, turning the comic book superhero into a tributary of State and ideological violence and oppression. In *The Boys*, this takes the form a chemical compound known as Blue in its diluted form, which inadvertently also gives Hughie superpowers.

The point of Millar, Ennis, and Mills' stories is to explore the question of whether the presence of Superman's, or any character of what can broadly be

described as the ‘Superman type,’ on a diegetic earth is a benefit or a detriment to human being on that earth. Is one to conclude that Superman's mere presence on an Earth will inevitably result in humanity relinquishing any attempt to strive toward self-improvement, the pursuit of its fullest potential, placing no value on the feeling of accomplishment, or the end of true creativity? In view of Superman's seemingly altruistic career, full of sacrifice, valor, leadership, and goodwill, it would seem that these questions are at least defamatory, at most iconoclastic. However, as Gadon states, the more exigent question rather is “whether or not Superman should act the way he does, regardless of how his actions might make us feel in the short-term” (Gadon 102). I argue that the question of should must also be paired with the questions of can and ought namely, should Superman, with its unique skill set, act in the way it does or ought it behave differently precisely because of its unique position? Using the aesthetic and narrative conventions of the superhero genre, Mills and Ennis go about answering this question by everting the characters of their respective diegeses, coring, and exposing their conventionally unrepresentable and non-existent shadow-selves, their impulses, desires, hatreds and fears exacerbated by their powers and Othernesses that the typical extradiegetic or diegetic public imagine of said characters as superheroes ordinarily shadows. Through the characterizations, aesthetics, and narratives of the diegetic worlds of *The Boys* and *Marshal Law*, Mills and Ennis externalize and disseminate this kind of skepticism in global socio-economic, political, and bio-evolutionary terms.

Conversely, Luthor's letter, in Millar's *Red Son*, introduces an internal skepticism whereby Superman has no alternative but to question itself, forcing it to consider a skeptical position regarding not only its presence on an earth, but the role it occupies as a moralistic savior and protector of its humankind. I conclude that in the least, Superman's continued presence and direct moral activity on diegetic the diegetic earths of the DC Multiverse and in their human affairs produces a false consciousness. By this I mean that the disruptivity of Superman's power and Otherness effects a distortion of those realities, the malleability of humanity's ideological constructions, human potential, human achievement, and the human will to power. At most, Superman's presence and direct moral activity on an the diegetic earths of the DC Multiverse and in its human affairs results in an atrophying of the desire for change, self-mastery, and self-overcoming in the human beings it serves. It breeds an entrenched sense of dependency on an extraterrestrial solution for terrestrial problems. Although *Red Son* presents an interesting and important thought experiment, extradiegetic human beings do not have to look to hypothetical scenarios, fascist, communist, or democratic, to question the consequences of the interpellation of superpower into ideology. We have enough examples of the acute damage ideological fervor can exact on human life and values in our own history, before the character fell from a diegetic sky into our extradiegetic imaginations. As such, I conclude that the most troubling thing about Superman is not the disruptivity of its power .and Otherness, but the ideological use of said phenomena.

CONCLUSION

We, in extradiegetic civilization, live in times mired in immoral or unethical scandal, runaway population growth, alarming ecological degradation, the increased digitization of human being through the proliferation of technology, and countless other instances of sociopolitical upheaval. This has left secular society disenchanted. In many ways, popular culture is looked to for a sense of awe, hope, mystery, and wonder that is consistently eroded in our hyperreal age. Even our sense of wonder is itself increasingly mediated and produced by technology – be it by a gadget or a series of effects played out on a screen. The fact that, even now in the twenty-first century, human beings feel compelled to create and recreate narratives brimming with beings like Superman, still testing whether or not the potentials of its diegetic power, body, and Otherness have been exhausted, suggests that we, as patrons of these worlds, their narratives, heroes, and villains, are still deeply interested in being powerful and different. Being that our extradiegetic Earth is not a utopia or dystopia in any total sense, the desire for and fear of transvaluative power will persist in the human imagination, and will subsequently manifest in its myths, religions, stories and entertainment in some form. Even a cursory glance at the exponential increase in the multi-media popularity of comic book superheroes over the past decade suggests that the cult of the superhero has seen a tremendous resurgence in recent years. For the past seventy-eight years, Superman, the ur-example of the

comic book superbeing, has become a staple of Western mass consciousness. Its popularity has remained undimmed by time, as it is constantly gazetted in popular culture. Superman's longevity suggests that its effect is not limited to the lines, colors, speech and thought bubbles, and gutters of the comic book page. For many, Superman provides a viable myth of salvation that modern audiences can readily consume in these times of perpetual crisis.

Writers and artists often employ Superman and its iconography as a metaphor and adjective in a modern image-text language that speaks to themes including power, the body, and Otherness. In this sense, Superman and other comic book superbeings have become neo-archetypes in modern storytelling. Regardless of the way these characters are changed to satisfy or reflect the hopes and desires of the times in which they emerge, Superman's ostensibly resolute attitude toward human potential, goodness, and the value of 'truth' and 'justice' appear as an idealized vision we have of ourselves and our society. While the idealization Superman expresses is oftentimes represented as a victorious outcome of a moral struggle, the underlying cause of the character's struggles is a clash of contrasting modalities, technologies, or understandings of power. I have argued that the underlying commonality of the ideal envisaged on superhero comics pages – be it in Wonder Woman's martial prowess, in the Flash's speed, in the Green Lantern's constructs, in Superman's flight, or even in Batman's prodigious investigative faculties – is not moral probity, but power. In this way, Superman's power, body, and Otherness primarily appeal to the

idea of being able to affect the conditions of a world regardless of the reason, moral or otherwise. Its disruptivity appears to be a powerful, spectacular, and unstable symbol of the opportunity to catalyze a revaluation of all values, in short, the power to change a world. It is precisely the world-changing scope of the character's power in both its active and passive forms that makes it deeply disruptive. As such, Superman's disruptivity is not a pithy problem. However, if one does not take this disruptivity for granted, one is forced to ask questions with broad sociopolitical and philosophical implications. Is Superman an alien invader or a star-fallen messiah? Is it a role model or a revolutionary?

Two recurrent questions concerning any study of the comic book superbeing endeavor to answer are why comic book superbeings are important to us and what they tell us about ourselves. If Superman is a mirror for human being, what does the disruptivity of its being tell us about ourselves? I conclude that in its raw physical power, we find our own desire for a transcendent power that is able to disrupt all other powers that we as humans are subject to: from the abstract constructs of identity and morality, to the concrete structures of seemingly refractory laws like gravity, Superman's power is diegetically able to disrupt them all and can function beyond the ambit of human being entirely. However, while Superman's power reflects humanity's desire for a self-substantiating mode of being, it also reflects precisely that which we do not have namely, transcendent power itself. In this sense, its power is a marker of both what we wish we were and fear we do not nor potentially will ever have.

The inherent fear and danger in the disruptivity of the character's power, body, and Otherness push the limits of its acceptability. Despite diegetic humanity's most sophisticated armaments, Superman could single-handedly overcome any and all armies that could be put into the field. In no uncertain terms, barring a kryptonite or scorched Earth solution, those iterations of humanity are comparatively powerless against it if they incurred its wrath. Though the character's interpellation into a seemingly stable dialectic of good contra evil typically occludes reading Superman in such terms, the fact that any attempt to confront it would prove ultimately futile and costly in terms of both diegetic natural resources and human life raises the question how humanity could resist its power without ending in blood and heat-vision fire. Its power forces us to also concede to the dangers thereof because in its power are also intimations of a tyrannical alien autocrat which suggest that Superman on an Earth is an interminable affront to the idea of human potential. In diegetic humanity's dependence on and fear of its power, we see a weakening of our resolve.

In its body, we see an uncanny likeness to our own. We see a body marked and fractured by three identities or performances of self that trouble clear existential demarcations of identity, which reflect our own sense of fracture and bodily dissociation located in such tensions as the differences between our on-line personalities and our concrete bodies, for example. Additionally, in its multiplicity of selves, we see the multiplicity of roles and positions we play in our

day-to-day lives that are increasingly mediated by the virtual relations of the technological constituent of our fractured identities. For a being as uniquely deterritorialized as Superman, its desire for what it perceives to be the joys of belonging to a community are not completely absurd. However, its desire to belong necessarily involves the willful suppression of its Otherness, power, and body. For Superman, belonging is a ruse of totality: one which promises it a serviceable and full sense of humanity that is, however, undermined and left incomplete by the always-already presence of its power and Otherness. Furthermore, in its desire to relieve its ontological and existential solitude by belonging to human being, we see a fatuous abstention of power. We see a refusal to use its powers to actively disrupt the suppressive infrastructures of the systems it serves and gains a measure of a sense of belonging from. As such, we are left questioning whether or not the character's empathy truly extends beyond its line of sight. We begin to have reservations about the narrow moral use of its power because it has abhorrent consequences that not only require but perpetuate the suffering of billions in the DC hyperdiegesis. Reflected in its need for stability, community, purpose, and identity at the expense of the billions it could uplift if it used its power to overturn the apparatuses of oppression and exploitation is our own culpability in our own extradiegetic suffering that consistently calls out for the intercession of a savior, be it a sociopolitical movement, pioneering technology, or icon of enlightenment. As such, Superman's inability to act decisively in changing a world is as reproachable in it

as it is in ourselves.

In its Otherness, we see an intimation of starting again in being from elsewhere. In the disposition of the interstellar orphan, we see the potential to uproot ourselves, to go beyond the limits of our Earth, its history, and its types of being, and replant them somewhere else. In Superman's Otherness we find a paradoxically familiar newness reflected in its uncanny resemblance to us. While its uncanniness invites reflections on the similarities and differences between it and humanity, Superman's diegetic power, body, and Otherness do not emerge within the history of 'human nature.' This essential difference to humanity makes its staunch defense of human ideals and the idea of the actualization of human potential appear as a somewhat incongruent application of its resources. After all, both extradiegetic and diegetic human histories have an exhaustive array of examples to illustrate how ideology has devastated the planet and endangered the human species while claiming to improve it in the same breath. However regrettable, this violent and bloody history, replete with obvious and seemingly invisible instances of self-violence, self-repression, and self-devaluation, is inextricable from the ideals and virtues whose name Superman saves and destroys in. As such, throughout its diegetic career as a superhero, it has obsessively and violently enforced precepts that are dangerously and paradoxically other to it. They are ours and the product and basis of our civilization, our knowledge systems, and our philosophies. They also form the basis of our inequalities and atrocities. It would appear that there is something

deeply suspicious about a being who looks like us, using powers we do not have to perpetuate such discord.

In this way, its uncanniness conveys a sense of emendation and compromise because its interpellation into human ideology suggests that the disruptivity of its power, body, and Otherness can be allayed and made assimilable. While the disruptivity of the character's power, body, and Otherness appeal to the idea of revaluing the fundamentals of being and society understood heretofore, the fact that they are also interpellated into human ideology means that they cannot be put forward to describe or justify an attempt or striving to overcome them as such an attempt of overcoming inevitably relapses into itself, into the reproduction of that which it sought to, in principle, overcome. As a result, Superman is paradoxically so attractive and repulsive, so familiar and so Other. In short, reflected in the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness, we see the potential for radical sociopolitical and onto-existential destabilization and the possibility of the reification of both utopia and dystopia. That said, the conventional and convenient appeal to moral comfort more than a celebration or sustained critique of the creative/destructive potential of the character's disruptivity leaves its most exigent issues unaccommodated.

Ultimately, what Superman symbolizes has changed throughout the character's publication history. It has gone from being a violent terrorist against organized crime, corruption, and the general exploitation of the proletariat, to being a symbolic soldier in the war against fascism. However, this project has

attempted to illustrate how the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness appeal to something more fundamental than the perceived righteousness or ignominy of particular ideologies and regimes. The disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness addresses feelings of fracture, isolation, and powerlessness in the fear of economic collapse, never-ending war and the threat of terrorism, sociopolitical upheaval, and the ever-mounting technocratic world order we face today. Its power, body, and Otherness reflect what we fear and need. Its disruptivity points toward a future in which being is powerful, embodied, and Other to the systems of oppression and control that preceded and sought to dominate it.

From this futurist perspective, Superman appears to be an antitype of human being. In the smile, the wave, the joy of Superman, we see a celebration of the joy of power and freedom whereby power is no longer a bad word. In Superman's steadfastness and discipline, we see the intimation of the potential to relinquish all atrophy or surrender. In the liminality of its Otherness, we see the intimation of overcoming and a movement beyond the bucolic heartland exemplified by the Kansas wheat-fields, the techno-futuristic Tomorrowism of the Deco-inflected cityscape of Metropolis, and even the Earth itself. In its power we see an intimation of the possibilities of being beyond ideology, good, evil, and even humanity: beyond the pursuit of 'truth, justice, and the American' way, beyond the desire to belong, beyond Kal-El, and the limiting performances of self called "Clark Kent" and "Superman." The character's disruptivity suggests

that it truly needs nothing to be free. In the disruptivity of its power, body, and Otherness are intimations of a power that is subject only to itself. In this way, the character is like the embodiment of a future where being is not necessarily substantiated by technology or ideological categorizations or even moral and ethical dialectics. As such, its disruptivity enjoins us to think of newness and freedom.

That said, its disruptivity has undeniably sinister undertones as well. This project has attempted to analyze the onto-existential ramifications of the character's commanding position of power. I have attempted to illustrate that Superman's disruptivity manifests in such a way that suggests that we must abandon the idea that Superman essentially represents all that is good and best in us. What Superman is, that is, the residual, recurrent elements of the character are power, the uncanny body, and Otherness, whose inter-relationship mediate the reader's desire and fear of power. Superman's disruptivity is precisely what, in theory, would allow a type of quantum leap in science and philosophy – in short, our understanding of being. However, this potential is ossified in moral arrangements which ultimately puts the potential effects of its power, body, and Otherness in the shade.

While the disruptivity of Superman's power, body and Otherness seemingly offer a respite from the mediocrity of modern life, a space in which transvaluative potential still exists, this power and the potential it carries is more often than not used to intensify the mediocrity of modern life and its sociopolitical

and economic systems by diegetically perpetuating the authority of the extradiegetic State. In this sense, Superman, who is often seen as an aspirational figure, uses its power, body, and Otherness to make war, to be a fascistic sentinel, and to (re)produce fear and despair in its very activity as a 'benevolent' superhero. Its extradiegetic publication history illustrates that its array of transvaluative creativity becomes systematically entangled in a consensus of rules and conventions idealized in the concepts of human ideology that give us a working understanding of being. Therefore, the character's diegetic disruptivity is simultaneously an exacerbation of these pre-existing technologies and flows of power precisely by being their enforcer and protector, while at the same time being a challenge to them by simply existing among them. In doubting the validity of the assumed necessity of Superman as a hero, this project has attempted to argue that Superman cannot put on a costume and become a widely accepted administrator of 'truth' and 'justice' in which evil and good are clearly demarcated and dealt with in an "appropriate" fashion. After witnessing the dynamics and flux of diegetic representations of human being, it is not only suspicious but prejudicial to human being for Superman to continue to endorse the reductive moral code it enforces. This suspicion is founded on the notion that based on its panoply of powers, the character should also possess the analytical faculties to recognize that human being is not neat and is built on, functions through, and reproduces aporias as essential as the tension between existence and humanity's semiological representation and

understanding thereof. What is perhaps worse still is the fact that in terms of what Superman can or could do in these worlds, such suspicions may not matter because it has the power to make its will true, the power to make right and wrong, good and evil. Paradoxically, human beings still express a constant need or desire for characters like it. We still refuse to revolt against Superman and, instead, not only tolerate it, but celebrate it.

It is the unconscious assumption of the probity of the character's actions and being as beneficent that I find objectionable as the ideological interpellation of Superman's disruptivity erodes my confidence in such a view. We have to be careful how we see Superman and superheroes more broadly. Due to the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness, we cannot reduce the utopian and dystopian potential inherent in its disruptivity to a dialectic of diegetic good contra evil, or the extradiegetic State contra escape therefrom. Superman's reflection of human being ultimately suggests that until both Superman and humanity decisively revalue or disrupt themselves, the utopian potential inherent in both will remain untried. Keep in mind that ideology also functions in the dream of its escape. Superman is still ensconced in the mentality and self-understanding of a Kansas farm boy, which, for an extradiegetic or diegetic human, would be perfectly acceptable, but for a being commanding such radical possibilities for being on an entire planet, is dubious. As such, we have to be suspicious of Superman's ability to redeem human being if it does not also redeem itself of human being. Its failure to do so leaves

its disruptivity coming off as a deformed impression of power marked by an absence of lasting effect.

I have attempted to show that another reason to be suspicious of Superman is due to the fact that Superman's need of a purpose and sense of belonging causes depredations to life on diegetic Earths. In view of the fracture of its power, body, and Otherness, Superman as superhero also suggests that diegetic society is 'aided' under the auspices of a benevolent lie or, rather, a lie of benevolence. This is because Superman's narrow application of its power lacks a sense of proportion. The necessary interest in the continual suffering of the human race makes the character's purportedly obstinate moralism, summed up in its credo of 'truth' and 'justice', appear ignominious, casuistic, and indefensible. In order to have an 'acceptable' or 'legitimate' outlet for its powers in the form of saving people from robberies, muggings, rapes, wars, and hunger, the character necessarily needs people to suffer and die under the repressive apparatuses of human ideology that reproduce the conditions that require its intercession in the first place. If it continues to implement its form of dialectical moralism and, consequently, its heretofore policy of effective collaboration and collusion with the State's exploitative use of moralism, then its being ensures the limitless reproduction of ideology and its apparatuses of coercion and repression. If the cost of Superman as superhero is the limitation of free creation of new modes of being by taking up humanity's ideological residues and using its power, body, and Otherness to transmit them and punish those who do not

obey, then the character's moralism is not paying any compliment to the idea of both its own or humanity's potential. The seemingly noble and pure concept of Superman as superhero is far from neutral. A critique of Superman and the concept of the superhero more broadly that does not excoriate or at least draw attention to the ideological violence inherent in its activity, even as a vigilante, risks allowing the disruptivity of Superman's power, body, and Otherness to remain unchecked as a technology of oppression. This project has attempted to recognize this danger and bring the character's clearly moralistic and essentially dialectical decisions, their metaphysical aspects, and their consequences to bear. I have attempted to illustrate how the propaganda of human being as it has been understood heretofore does not conduce to the reification of Superman's potential and how interpellation is guilty of abusing the existential emergency Superman represents. Its sublimation into ideology appears to be a prevarication of the most radical aspects of the character's power; a shortfall of power manacled the potential futures of these diegetic planets inherent in the power, body, and Otherness of 'The Man of Tomorrow' to the never-ending moral struggles of Today. After its arrival on a diegetic Earth, its human race can never be free of the Other's gift/curse of disruptivity. Just as it will always carry something of an Earth and its version of human being with it even unto the stars, so too will its intimation of a different or Other type of being remain on that Earth, in the imaginations of its human beings. As such, I regard Superman as admirable for what its disruptivity intimates, but contemptible for what it uses its

disruptivity for.

In *Supergods*, Morrison describes Superman as “Apollo, the sun god, the unbeatable supreme self, the personal greatness of which we all know we're capable [...] a hero of the day” to disenthral us from despair, fear, and nihilism (Morrison 15-16). In contrast, I conclude that the disruptivity of the character's power, body, and Otherness is best described using an effect of the sun namely, the gloaming. While Superman may be seen as a being of golden opulence, one that non-consumptively immolates itself to provide an expedient light for human beings to follow, I argue that this light is darkly lit. In view of its recalcitrant attitude toward change and the fascistic undercurrent of the use of its power, its seemingly invaluable luster now only offers a shady worth. It is the circuitousness of Superman's use of power that sequesters the potential its light emits in a gloaming demimonde, leaving the horizons of human being draped in the shadow of its cape.

Appendix A

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 690 (August, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Annual Vol. 1, No. 11 (July, 2008). Written by Geoff Johns and Richard Donner, illustrated by Adam Kubert.

Action Comics Annual Vol. 1, Vol. 2 (May, 1989). Written by Jerry Ordway, George Pérez & Roger Stern, illustrated by Jerry Ordway, Mike Mignola & Curt Swan.

Action Comics No. 890-900 (August, 2010-June, 2011). Written by Paul Cornell, illustrated by Pete Woods et al.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 252 (May, 1959). Written by Robert Bernstein, illustrated by Al Plastino.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 254 (July, 1959). Written by Otto Binder, illustrated by Howard Sherman.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 484 (June, 1978). Written by Cary Bates, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 507 & 508 (May: June, 1980). Written by Carey Bates, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 544 (June, 1983). Written by Carey Bates, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 554 (April, 1984). Written by Marv Wolfman, illustrated by Gil Kane.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 583 (September, 1986). Written by Alan Moore, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 643 (July, 1989). Written by George Pérez, illustrated by George Pérez & Brett Breeding.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 654 (June, 1990). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Bob McLeod.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 659 (November, 1990). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Bob McLeod.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 660 (December, 1990). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Bob McLeod.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 663 & 664 (March, 1991). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Bob McLeod.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 674 (February, 1992). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Bob McLeod.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 675 (March, 1992). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Bob McLeod.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 684 (December, 1992). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 685 (January, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 686 (February, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 687 (June, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 688 (July, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 689 (July, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 691 (September, 1993). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Jackson Guice.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 769 (September, 2000). Written by Joe Kelly, illustrated by Kano.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 770 (October, 2000). Written by Joe Kelly, illustrated by Kano.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 775 (March, 2001). Written by Joe Kelly, illustrated by Doug Mahnke & Lee Permejo.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 837 (May, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff

Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 838 (June, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 839 (July, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Renato Guedes.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 840 (August, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 844-846 (December, 2006-February, 2007). Written by Geoff Johns and Richard Donner, illustrated by Adam Kubert.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 851 (August, 2007). Written by Geoff Johns and Richard Donner, illustrated by Adam Kubert.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 858-864 (December, 2007-June, 2008). Written by Geoff Johns, illustrated by Frank & Joe Prado.

Action Comics Vol. 1, No. 866-870 (August-December, 2008). Written by Geoff Johns, illustrated by Gary Frank.

Action Comics Vol. 2, No. 1-18 (November 2011-May, 2013). Written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Rags Morales.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 444 (September, 1988). Written by John Byrne, illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 451 (February, 1989). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 452 (March, 1989). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 453 (April, 1989). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 454 (May, 1989). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 455 (June, 1989). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 456 (July, 1989). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 467 (June, 1990). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 472 (November, 1990). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 476 (March, 1991). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 477 (April, 1991). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 478 (May, 1991). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 488 (March, 1992). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 489 (April, 1992). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 497 (December, 1992). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 498 (January, 1993). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 499 (February, 1993). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 500 (June, 1993). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 501 (June, 1993). Written by Karl Kesel, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 502 (July, 1993). Written by Karl Kesel, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 503 (August, 1993). Written by Karl Kesel, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 504 (September, 1993). Written by Karl Kesel, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 505 (October, 1993). Written by Karl Kesel, illustrated by Tom Grummett.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 582 (September, 2000). Written by J. M. DeMatteis, illustrated by Mike S. Miller.

Adventures of Superman Vol. 1, No. 583 (October, 2000). Written by J. M. DeMatteis, illustrated by Mike S. Miller.

All-Star Superman Vol. 1, No. 1-12 (January-October, 2008). Written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Frank Quitely.

Crisis on Infinite Earths Vol. 1, No. 1-12 (April, 1985-March, 1986). Written by Marv Wolfman, illustrated by George Pérez.

DC Comics Presents Vol. 1, No. 97 (September, 1986). Written by Steve Gerber, illustrated Rick Veitch.

DC: One Million Vol. 1, No. 1-4 (November, 1998). Written by Grant Morrison, illustrated Val Semeiks.

Emperor Joker Vol. 1, No. 1 (October, 2000). Written by Joe Kelly and Jeph Loeb, illustrated by Duncan Rouieau, Todd Nauck, Carlo Barberi & Scott McDaniel.

Final Crisis Vol. 1, No. 1-7 (July, 2008-March, 2009). Written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by J. G. Jones, Carlos Pacheco, Doug Mahnke et al.

Final Crisis: Superman Beyond Vol. 1, No. 1 & 2 (October, 2008; March, 2009). Written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Doug Mahnke.

Green Lantern Vol. 3, No. 46 (October, 1993). Written by Gerard Jones, illustrated by Gerard Jones, illustrated by Mark Bright.

Hitman Vol. 1, No. 34 (February, 1999). Written by Garth Ennis, illustrated by John McCrea.

Infinite Crisis Vol. 1, No. 1-7 (December, 2005-June, 2006). Written by illustrated by Phil Jimenez.

JLA Vol. 1, No. 6 & 7 (June-July, 1997). Written by Grant Morrison, illustrated by Howard Porter.

Justice League America Vol. 1, No. 69 (December, 1992). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Justice League America Vol. 1, No. 70 (January, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Kamandi Vol. 1, No. 29 (May, 1975). Written and illustrated by Jack Kirby.

Man of Steel Vol. 1, No. 1-6 (October-December, 1986). Written and illustrated by John Byrne.

Starman Vol. 1, No. 28 (November, 1990). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Dave Hoover.

Superman & Batman: Generations Vol. 1, No. 1 (January-March, 1999). Written and illustrated by John Byrne.

Superman Adventures Vol. 1, No. 41 (March, 2000). Written by Mark Millar, illustrated by Ty Templeton.

Superman Annual Vol. 1, No. 13 (November, 2007). Written by Kurt Busiek, illustrated by Carlos Pacheco.

Superman for All Seasons Vol. 1, No. 1-4 (September, 1998-December, 1998). Written by Jeph Loeb, illustrated by Tim Sale.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 129 (May, 1959). Written by Jerry Coleman, illustrated by Wayne Boring.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 141 (November, 1960). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Wayne Boring.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 147 (August, 1961). Written by Robert Bernstein, illustrated by Al Plastino.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 149 (November, 1961). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 156 (October, 1962). Written by Edmond Hamilton, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 162 (October, 1963). Written by Edmond Hamilton, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 164 (October, 1963). Written by Edmond Hamilton, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 167 (February, 1964). Written by Carey Bates & Edmond Hamilton, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 199 (August, 1967). Written by Jim Shooter, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 2 (July, 1963). Written by Leo Dorfman, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 233-238 (January-June, 1971). Written by Dennis O'Neil, illustrated Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 240-242 (July-September 1971). Written by Dennis O'Neil, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 30 (September, 1944). Written by Jerry Siegel, illustrated by Ira Yarbrough.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 400 (October, 1984). Written by Elliot S. Maggin, illustrated by Joe Orlando.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 416 (February, 1986). Written by Elliot S. Maggin, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 423 (September, 1986). Written by Alan Moore, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 53 (August, 1948). Written by Bill Finger, illustrated by Wayne Boring.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 61 (November, 1949). Written by William Woolfolk & Bill Finger, illustrated by Al Plastino & Wayne Boring.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 650 (May, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 651 (June, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 652 (July, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 653 (August, 2006). Written by Kurt Busiek & Geoff Johns, illustrated by Pete Woods.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 654-667 (September, 2006-November, 2007). Written by Kurt Busiek, illustrated by Carlos Pacheco.

Superman Vol. 1, No. 76 (June, 1952). Written by Edmond Hamilton, illustrated by Curt Swan.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 160 (September, 2000). Written by Jeph Loeb, illustrated by Ed McGuinness.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 161 (October, 2000). Written by Jeph Loeb, illustrated by Ed McGuinness.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 2 (February, 1987). Written and illustrated by John Byrne.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 21 (September, 1988). Written and illustrated by John Byrne.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 22 (June, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 28 (February, 1989). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Kerry Gammill.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 29 (March, 1989). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 30 (April, 1989). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Kerry Gammill.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 31 (May, 1989). Written by Roger Stern & Tom Peyer, illustrated by

Paris Cullins.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 32 (June, 1989). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Kerry Gammill.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 33 (July, 1989). Written by Roger Stern, illustrated by Kerry Gammill.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 44 (June, 1990). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 49 (November, 1990). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 50 (December, 1990). Written by Jerry Ordway, illustrated by Jerry Ordway, Curt Swan, John Byrne, Kerry Gammill & Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 54 (April, 1991). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 55 (May, 1991). Written and illustrated by Jerry Ordway.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 65 (March, 1992). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 66 (April, 1992). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 74 (December, 1992). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 76 (February, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 77 (March, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 79 (July, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 80 (August, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 81 (September, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 82 (October, 1993). Written and illustrated by Dan Jurgens.

Superman Vol. 2, No. 9 (September, 1987). Written and illustrated by John Byrne.

Superman Vol. 3, No. 32-39 (June, 2014-March, 2015). Written by Geoff Johns, illustrated by John Romita Jr.

Superman vs. Muhammad Ali: All-New Collector's Edition No. C-56 (1978). Written by Neal Adams & Dennis O'Neil, illustrated by Neal Adams & Dick Giodano.

Superman: Birthright (September, 2003–September, 2004). Written by Mark Waid, illustrated by Leinil Francis Yu.

Superman: Earth One Vol. 1, No. 1 (December, 2010). Written by J. Michael Straczynski, illustrated by Shane Davis.

Superman: Man of Steel (September, 1993). Written by Louise Simonson, illustrated by Jon Bogdanove.

Superman: Man of Steel Vol. 1, No. 10 (April, 1992). Written by Louise Simonson, illustrated by Jon Bogdanove.

Superman: Man of Steel Vol. 1, No. 104 (September, 2000). Written by Mark Schultz, illustrated by Doug Mahnke.

Superman: Man of Steel Vol. 1, No. 105 (October, 2000). Written by Mark Schultz, illustrated Doug Mahnke.

Superman: Man of Steel Vol. 1, No. 18 (December, 1992). Written by Louise Simonson, illustrated by Jon Bogdanove.

Superman: Man of Steel Vol. 1, No. 19 (January, 1993). Written by Louise Simonson, illustrated by Jon Bogdanove.

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